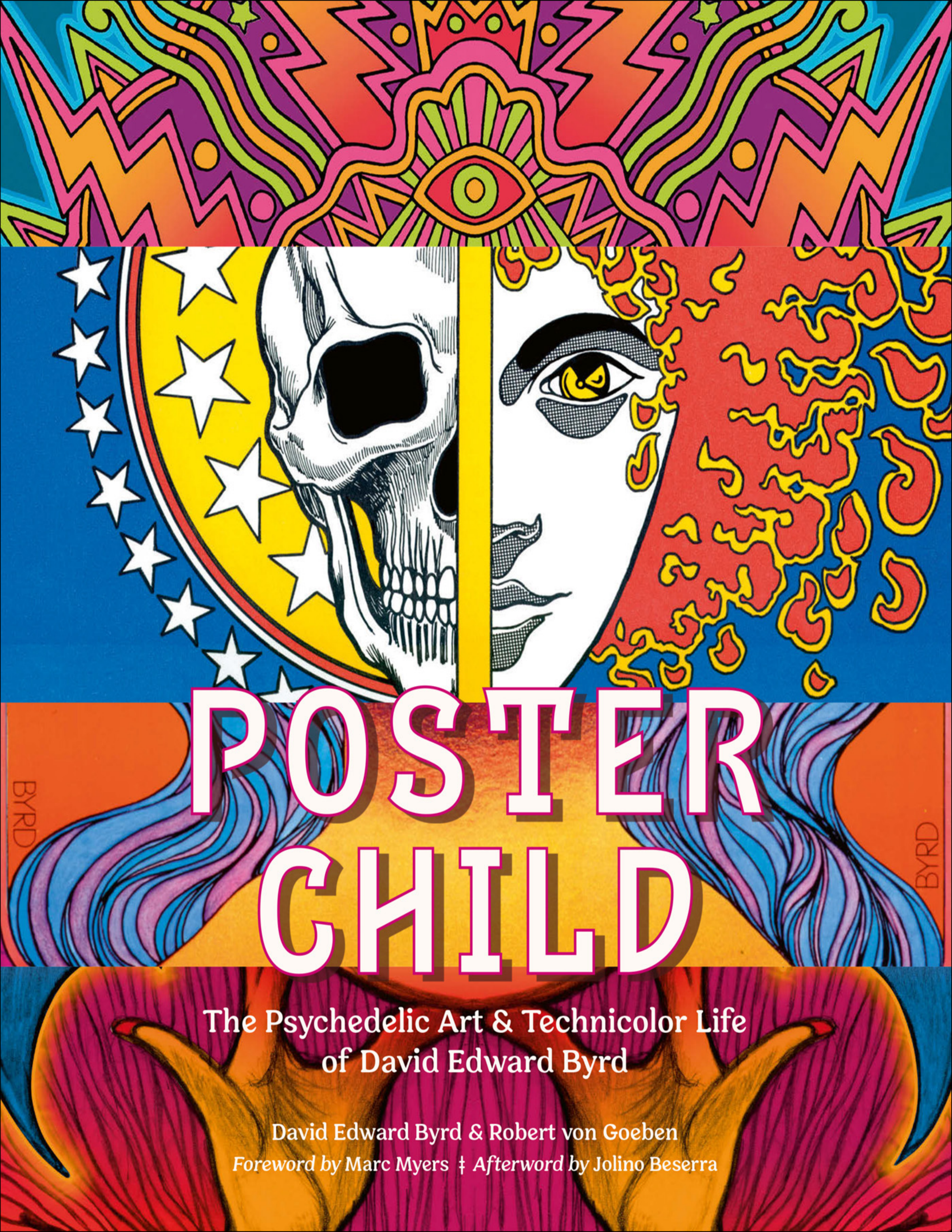
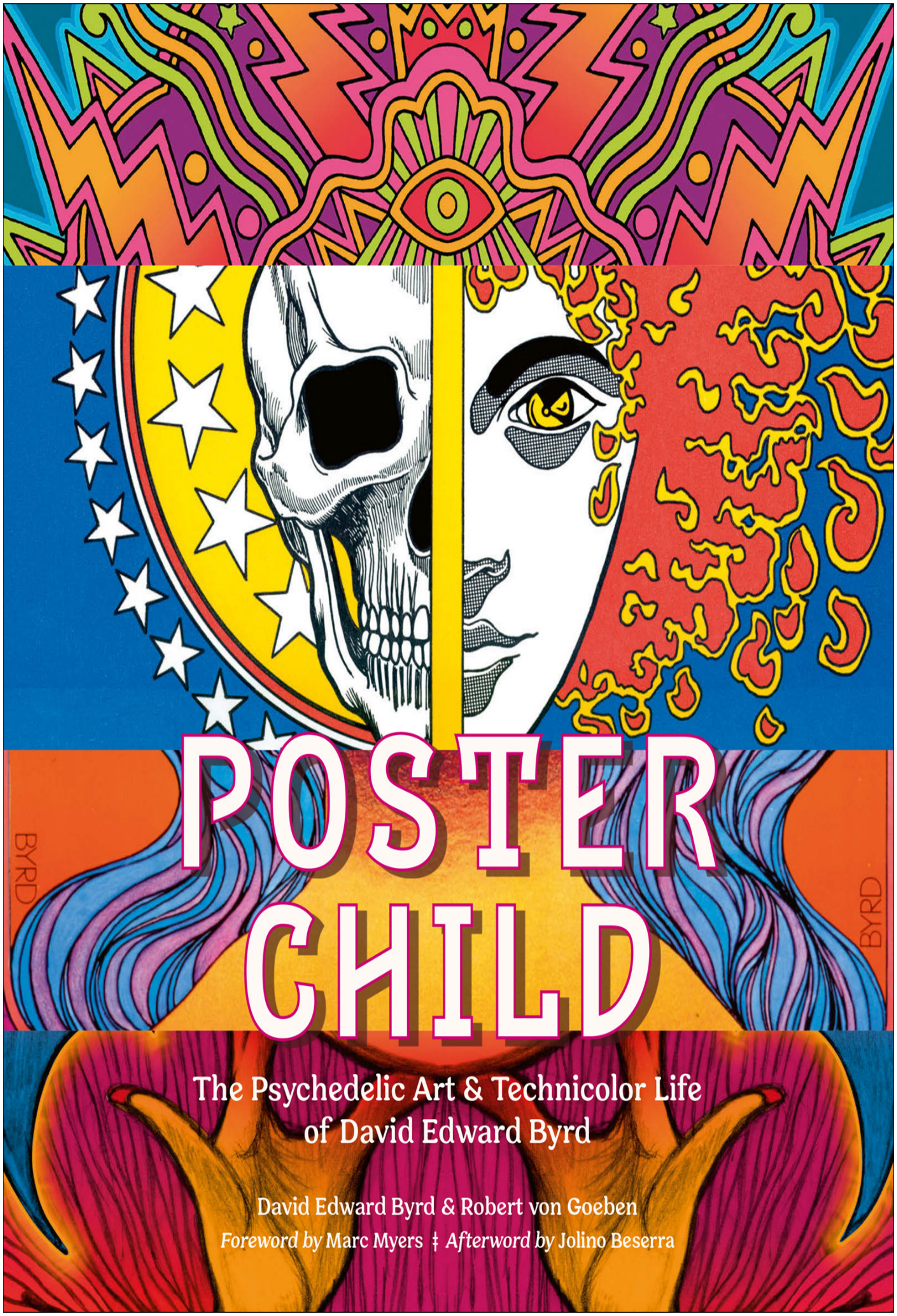


POSTER CHILD

The Psychedelic Art & Technicolor Life of David Edward Byrd

David Edward Byrd & Robert von Goeben

Foreword by Marc Myers ‡ *Afterword by* Jolino Beserra



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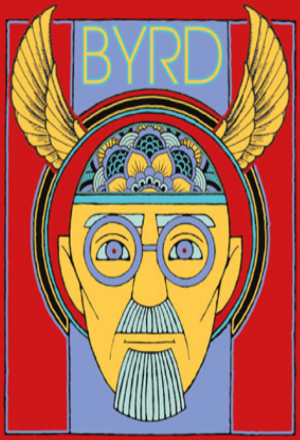
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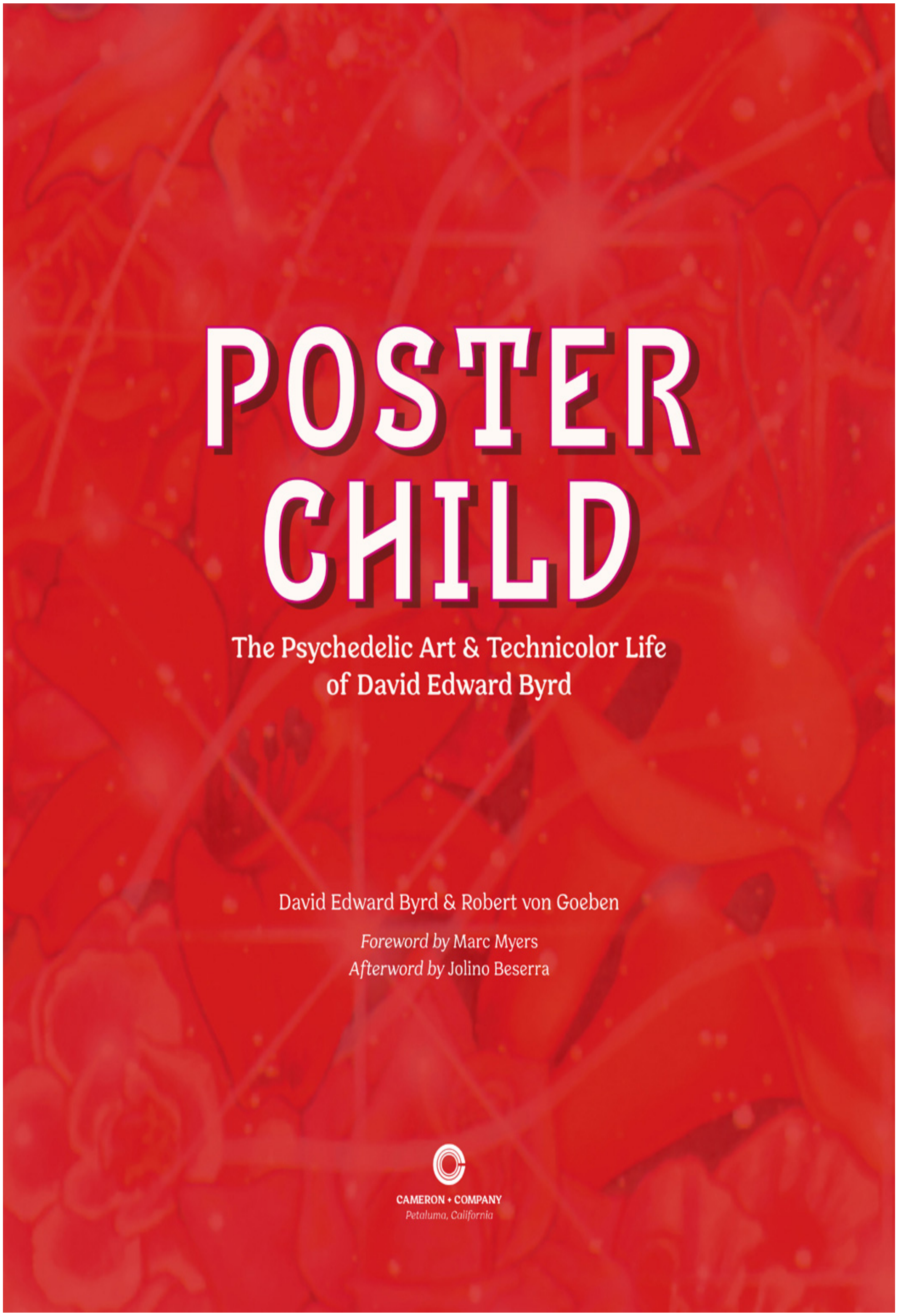

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CAMERON + COMPANY
Petaluma, California

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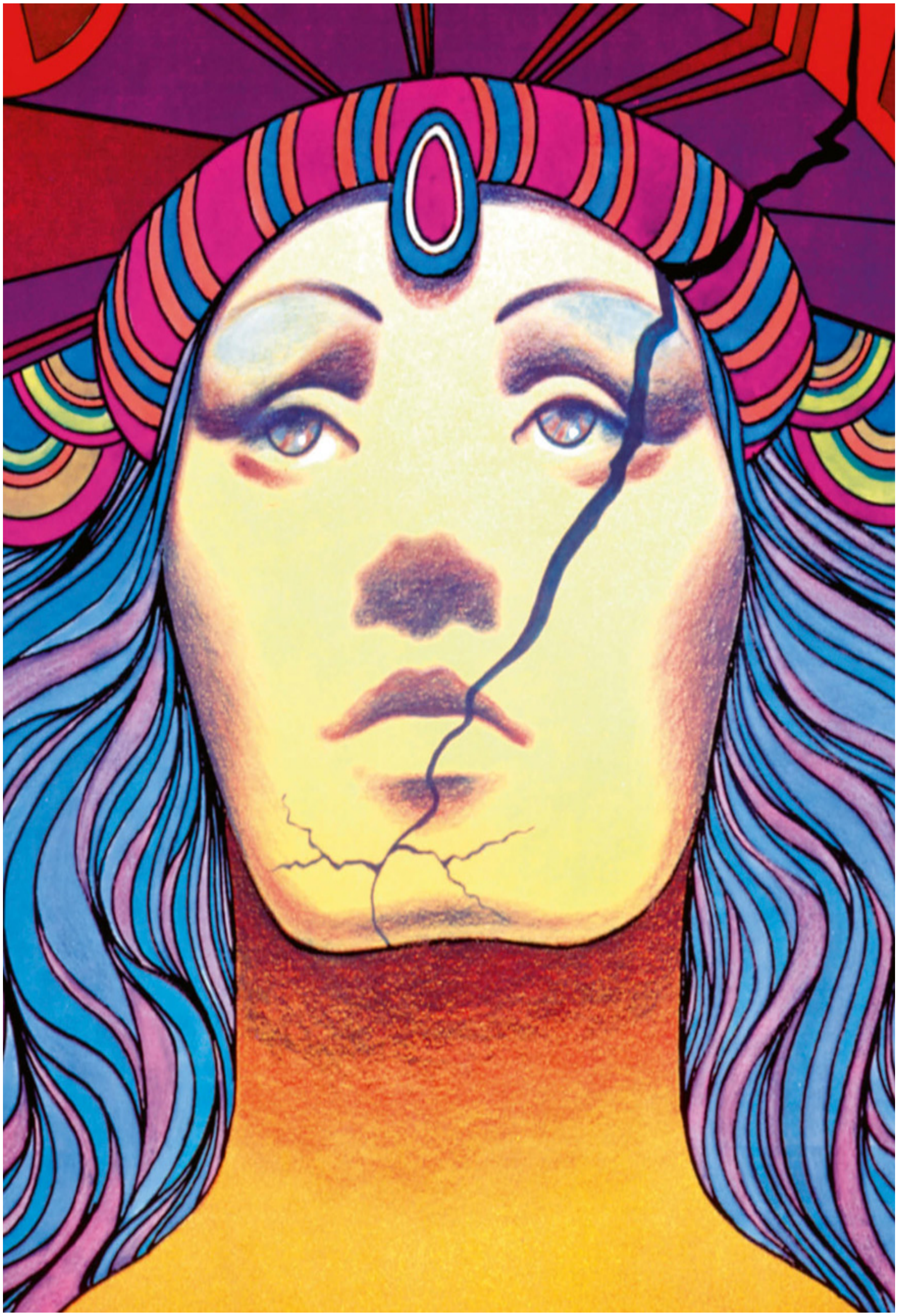

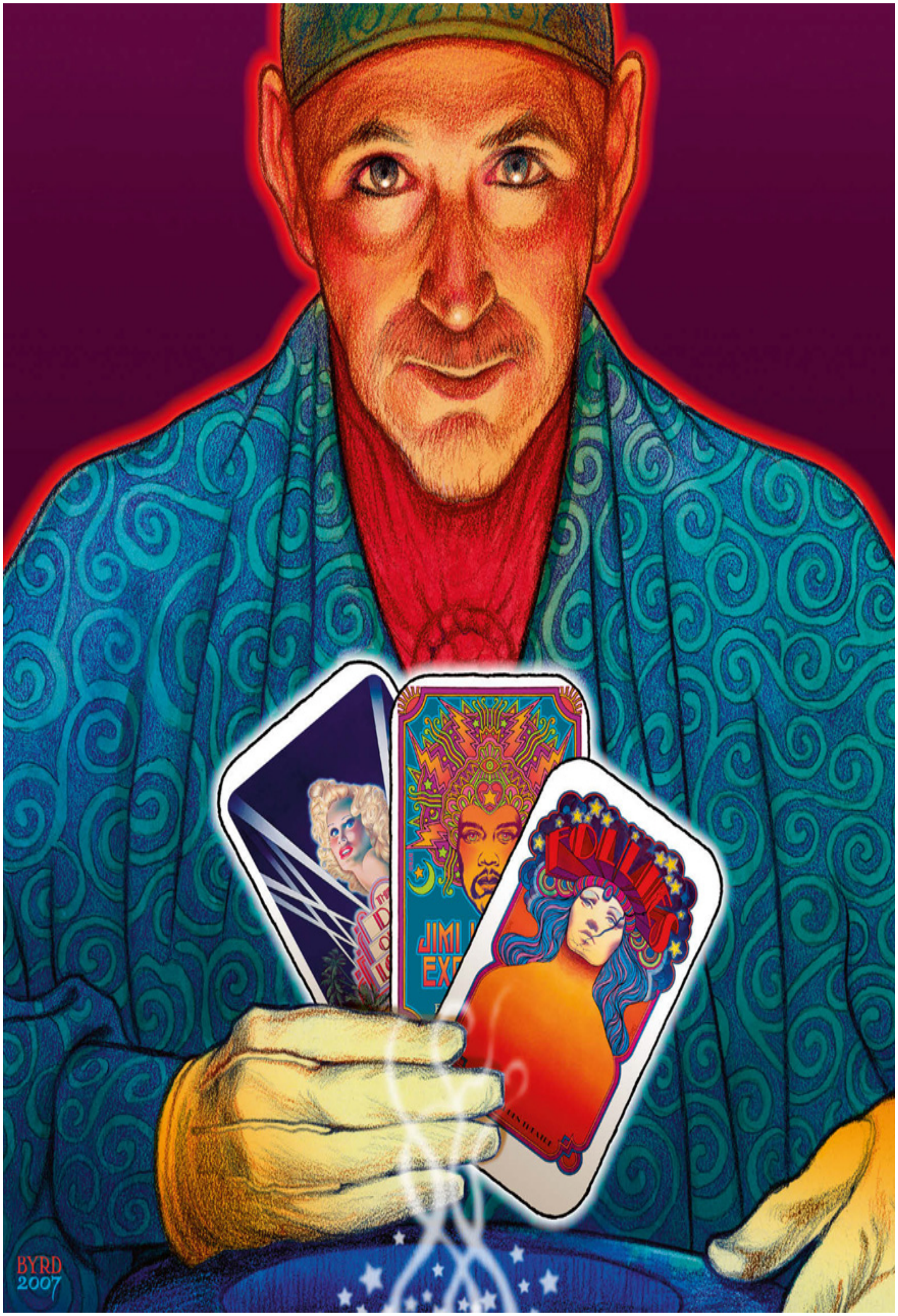
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PREFACE

by David Edward Byrd

AFTER A VERY LONG AND SHAMBOLIC LIFE IN THE ARTS, THIS BOOK IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING.

Putting this collection together has been an exhilarating, scary, and humbling experience. I never expected this to happen in my lifetime, and I have so many loving human beings to whom I am ever grateful for continuing to believe in me and my art.

I am thrilled by images; there is almost too much gorgeous art to look at in this benighted world. Why do I have a hundred favorite painters? When I began my life as a posterist in my late twenties, I was completely naive about the art world. I had no idea what a rich and delicious world I was entering—like Madeline in Ludwig Bemelmans's ice-cream parlor! Little did I know some of the perils that lay ahead—many of which were hiding inside myself, to be frank. My love of technique led to my letting the assignment tell me what technique I would use. The downside of this is that many of my works seem unrelated to one another—but now, as it all coalesces before my old hippie eyes, there seems to be a rhyme and reason to it all.

I am just so thrilled to be a part of this very special world of images and image makers. As for my art, I do not know why I embraced the art of the pastiche, but it is perhaps due to my love of process: how in the hell did they do that? Also, from my start in commercial art, I was always referencing the past—perhaps sometimes to my detriment, but sometimes to my great success.

Once I transitioned from fine art to graphic art, I fell in love with many of its artists past and present. First there was art nouveau and Alphonse Mucha with his delectable and sinuous curves, then the Beggarstaffs' audacious cut-paper posters for mythical companies and events, and the great A. M. Cassandre, whose *La Route Bleue* poster may be my favorite, though his steamship posters are very hard to resist. Next, I fell for the divine Ludwig Hohlwein from Munich, who is perhaps the greatest posterist of them all. But, myself being a colorist, it was the Japanese that took my breath away: Tadanori Yokoo and Ikko Tanaka, among many smashing posterists. If I had it to do over, I would simplify everything. Perhaps all old men say this!

And now, with this book, I am part of the official record of this time in image history. In this memoir, I have tried my best to relay these memories as accurately as I can, but as the saying goes, your mileage may vary. One clear thing I do know is that the final art product is merely the doo-doo, the refuse, the detritus of the creative experience. The golden moments in my life have always been the personal, magical world of the "Aha!" moment—the one thing that I have always treasured. I feel so fortunate to have had many of those creative moments, and that is what fills this book. Only the artist has this special, private moment, and it disappears when they die. To that and to you I say: Ciao!

FOREWORD

by Marc Myers

ROCK, FREEDOM, AND THE TECHNICOLOR DREAM.

I first encountered David Edward Byrd's rock-concert posters in 1970s suburbia. My father, Lou Myers, was a satirist, commercial graphic artist, *New Yorker* cartoonist, and short-story writer. In our house, his large, tilted art table faced a floor-to-ceiling bookshelf jammed with rare cartoon and art books collected from his years living in Paris with my artist mother and from book shops that once dotted Manhattan's Fifty-Seventh Street. As an introvert, I often wound up in my dad's studio, combing through his collection.

In 1969, we moved out of Manhattan to a rural hamlet an hour north of the city. Public-school crime was on the rise in the city, and my parents couldn't afford private school. Though I was safer and smarter in smaller classes in northern Westchester County, the rock-festival and arena-rock phenomenon that had begun to surge in the late 1960s passed me by. I was too young for Woodstock, too far from New York's indoor venues, and too wary of drugs. By the early 1970s, I had switched to jazz.

One day, mid-decade, I was going through my father's books when I pulled loose an oversized paperback from London of psychedelic rock-concert posters of the late 1960s. The color image that transfixed me the most was a 1968 poster by David Edward Byrd of the Jimi Hendrix Experience at the Fillmore East—"One Night Only, Friday, May 10." David's color choices were bewitching—lemon yellow, deep purple, burnt orange, mustard, and jet black. Hendrix and his bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell were illustrated inside a large circle taking up the top half of the poster. Type dominated the bottom half.

Most intriguing was the trio's hair. David had graphically merged the three musicians' afros into a kaleidoscopic op art frenzy of tiny, color-filled circles. Their afros seemed to shimmer the way things do in the summer heat. To enhance their aura, David added undulating waves of yellow and purple that emanated from their portraits. But there was something else that grabbed me. Instead of embracing the so-called bloodshot-eyeball approach common in so many posters in the book, David's concept was almost Palladian in its classical elegance and graphic balance. Clearly, he had a fine arts background, commercial experience, and knew how to spring-load illustration and type to not only dazzle but communicate clearly and quickly.

During the psychedelia revolution between 1966 and 1971 that eventually touched all corners of popular culture, no two rock-concert posters were alike. Yet all tapped into the tuned-out, turned-on ethos of concertgoers through a hot mess of vivid color, botanical lettering, and arousing imagery. Like the lava lamp and the light show, the look of each poster was designed to simulate an LSD trip. But you didn't have to drop acid to feel the subversive messaging. For the artists and audiences alike, the Day-Glo colors, wavy graphics, and surrealist illustrations became an underground lingua franca and affirmed that the concert being promoted was going to be loud and mind-blowing.

By the start of the 1970s, posters of all sorts had become ubiquitous in teenagers' bedrooms. Affordable and mountable with pushpins or tape, large, glossy images of rock stars and actors in new Hollywood films could be found rolled up and sold in nearly all book and record stores. On my teenage bedroom walls were posters that included Peter Fonda riding a chopper in *Easy Rider* and Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway in a still from *Bonnie and Clyde*. I also had a 1968 handbill poster for concerts by Buffalo Springfield, the Chambers Brothers, and Richie Havens. My half brother brought it back from San Francisco. If Johnny Mathis and ads for the Ford Fairlane and Chivas Regal made my parents feel connected to their generation, the posters in my bedroom made me feel part of mine.

Back then, rock-concert posters had a way of elbowing the youth culture to challenge the status quo and push back against greedy institutions and inflexible authority figures. The concert poster had come a long way. The first R&B concerts held at the start of the 1950s were promoted by minimalist posters with red and black typeface that merely announced the event and the artists due to perform. As the decade progressed, the poster evolved slowly and became only slightly more dynamic.

Multicolor posters for R&B revues and flamboyant rock and roll shows used small photo cutouts of artists' heads placed in the center of bursts to catch the eye. The typeface and colors had to do all the work. Even the Beatles' poster for their Shea Stadium concert in 1965 was flat. A grainy photo of the Fab Four in their Pierre Cardin suits was cut out and placed atop a canary-yellow background: "Beatles in Person, Plus All Star Show." Posters for American performances by the Rolling Stones and Dave Clark Five in 1965 weren't much better.

Then in 1966, a design upheaval took place in San Francisco, where numerous old theaters and ballrooms were being converted into rock, folk, and blues venues. The city was also home to a growing number of underground comic and magazine illustrators and photographers. These artists may not have been paid much to illustrate concert posters for local promotors such as Chet Helms and Bill Graham, but they now had complete freedom to express themselves using hallucinogenic themes and lettering.

From the start in 1966, posters for San Francisco concerts used fantasy imagery to evoke an ecstatic dreamscape that matched the transportive energy of the music being performed on stage. In 1966, LSD was still legal, and Owsley Stanley and his friends were manufacturing their own acid tabs in labs for wide distribution in San Francisco. Concert posters immediately spoke to tripping music fans who gravitated to long-form rock played on albums, theater stages, and newly emerging FM radio stations.

One of the first San Francisco poster artists to explore this new look was Wes Wilson, whose gripping *Are We Next?* anti-war poster caught the eye of concert promoter Chet Helms. Wilson was soon creating posters for Helms and Graham that channeled the energy of dances held by the promoters. The posters were so appealing that people tore them down and put up at home. Other West Coast artists who began working for Graham pushed the style further and branded Graham's concerts and his hands-on approach to concert production.

When Graham opened the Fillmore East in New York in 1968, he needed East Coast artists who could emulate the San Francisco poster style. David Edward Byrd recalls that Peter Nevard, his partner in Fantasy Unlimited, urged him to call his friend, Joshua White. White had founded the Joshua Light Show, which projected liquid color collages as a backdrop during concerts at the Fillmore using a rear screen and overhead projectors. When David made the call, Josh suggested that he call Kip Cohen, the Fillmore's general manager who did all the hiring. The first Fillmore East poster that David illustrated was for a concert featuring Traffic, Blue Cheer, and Iron Butterfly. Cohen and Graham were happy with the results.

A self-confessed loner in New York, David traveled to San Francisco and hung out with some of the poster artists to get a feel for approach. The impact on his own art, David told me, was a merger of the music's freedom—"rock was different and could be anything"—and his passion for art history, specifically the art nouveau and the Vienna Secession movements of the 1890s. David also had been an art director for Fantasy Unlimited, which produced commercial light shows. In short order, he became one of the most distinct psychedelic poster artists on the East Coast.

David would go on to create the original Woodstock poster in 1969 before the festival moved to Bethel, New York, as well as arresting posters for Jefferson Airplane at the Fillmore East in 1968, the Rolling Stones' 1969 American tour, the Who's "Tommy" concert at the Fillmore East in 1969, and the Grateful Dead's "A Swell Dance Concert" in 1973 at the Nassau Coliseum. He also created iconic posters for Broadway's *Follies* (1970), *Godspell* (1971), and *The Magic Show* (1974). Movie posters and book covers followed.

The tingle I initially felt while staring at David's Jimi Hendrix poster in my father's studio would work its way into the promotional bloodstream, echoing a generational movement that rejected cookie-cutter conformity and embraced mind expansion, sensuality, and the spirit of individualism. By the mid-1970s, the psychedelic poster artists whose radical vision championed change, color, and freedom were driving the culture.

INTRODUCTION

by Robert von Goeben

IT'S ODD TO THINK THAT THIS HISTORY OF ARTIST DAVID EDWARD BYRD STARTED WITH A TRIP TO THE BATHROOM … BUT IT DID.

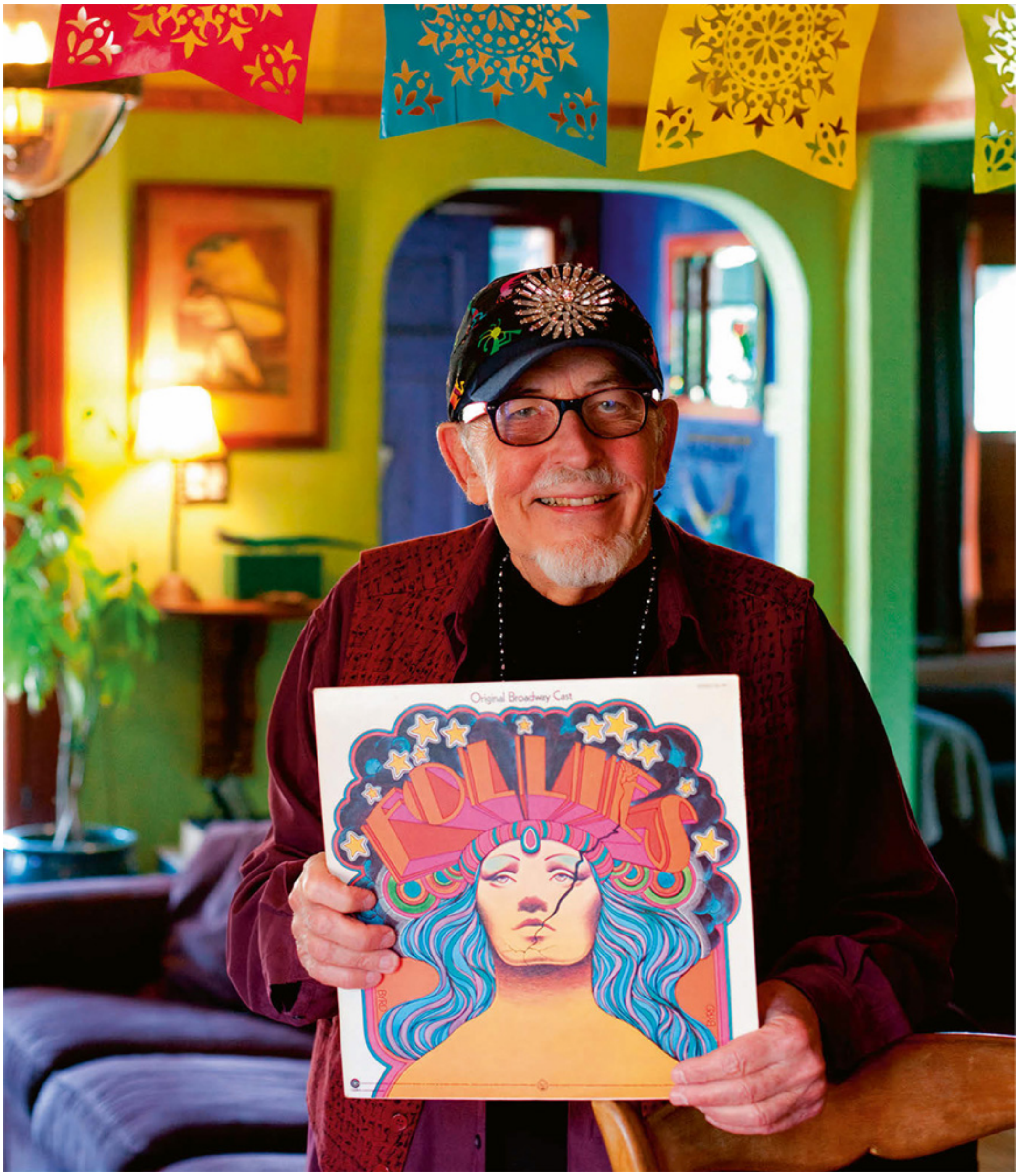
However, this visit to the john was far removed from much of the history you're about to read. It didn't take place in the artist hatchery of 1960s Carnegie Tech (later Carnegie Mellon University), where Byrd studied. It wasn't among the grimy streets of New York, where Byrd first created artwork for the Fillmore East. Nor did it happen in the slick confines of Broadway, where Byrd redefined the art of theater. This bio break happened in the safe and sober glaze of 1990s Los Angeles, a time of Macintosh computers and Johnny Rockets burger joints.

At that time, I was managing graphic arts for Geffen Records in Hollywood, so I knew firsthand that the art of rock had matured. Gone were the days of French curves and cash payments; designers had computers and worked under contract. These were sober days when smoking in the office was banned and drunken lunches at El Coyote (while not unheard of) were fading faster than vinyl records. The fact that I spent more nights in USC's business school than on the Sunset Strip says much about the era. Byrd and I first met when I was working with his husband, Jolino Beserra, on CBS ads for *TV Guide*, probably the most uncool art job in the industry. I only got the gig because someone happened to call someone. It was an accident.

By the 1990's, David Byrd's life was more Eisenhower-era domesticity than the hippie commune existence of his youth. This might explain why Byrd and Beserra decided to host a "meatloaf" party in 1990, which I attended. The homey little love nest they occupied in Beachwood Canyon was a curated combination of Day of the Dead and Danny Elfman. As the night's meat-fest wore on, I became less interested in the art talk than the Wisconsin cutie sitting a little too close to me at the table.

It was about this time that the aforementioned trip to the john took place. As I emerged from the bathroom, business completed, I noticed a small, framed artwork tucked in a space next to the door, as if it were hiding (or hidden) out of the limelight. I sat for a moment and admired the neoclassical painting of a woman with a water jar, surrounded by wild multicolor hearts, arrows, and cupids. The Victorian aesthetic fascinated me, as did the hard-to-read type that stated "An Aquarian Exposition."

I settled back in next to Miss Midwest and asked about the piece. In his nasal voice, whistled through a walrus mustache, Byrd told me it was the original poster for the 1969 Woodstock festival. To this I asked, as I'm sure many had before, "Wait, didn't the Woodstock poster have a bird and the guitar?" To this Byrd replied, "There's a story."


Original Broadway Cast
FOLLIES

David Edward Byrd poses in 2010 with the soundtrack album of Follies, *which utilizes his iconic poster design*.

That dinner was thirty-plus years ago, and it was the first story Byrd ever told me. How he was hired to produce a poster for what became the infamous Woodstock Festival, and how the festival promoters were dicked around and had to move the venue a number of times, and how they needed the poster changed, and how Byrd was in the Caribbean and unreachable, and how Arnold Skolnick got the call to create an alternate, and how it all came together by accident. But as you'll see, accidents play a huge part in the story of David Edward Byrd.

In the 1960s, Byrd and a handful of talented contemporaries defined the art of rock music. Before them, there wasn't much imagery to characterize this new art form. But Byrd didn't start out to create a name in graphic arts. Quite the opposite. As a star student at Carnegie Tech, where commercial and fine art were strictly separated, Byrd had his sights set on a life in fine art. He wanted to be Francis Bacon, not Saul Bass. But the phone rang, and some fellow Carnegie students were helping a guy named Bill Graham open a music venue in New York City, and they needed an artist. And here's the kicker: while Byrd is now considered one of the finest graphic artists of the twentieth century, he never really studied graphic arts. By his own admission, he didn't even know anything about typography. But talent is talent, and David was the best artist they knew, so he got the call. Boom … accident.

Now, fast-forward to the 2020s. The pandemic hit, and I spent my confinement creating and hosting an online music trivia show. David Byrd was a guest, telling one incredible story after another. Jimi Hendrix is building his infamous Electric Lady Studios in New York, and did Byrd wanna see it? Byrd gets paid for creating a poster for the Who, gets mugged on the way home, and Bill Graham (the mensch that he was) paid him again. The legendary Broadway producer Hal Prince allows David to submit a design for his new production called *Follies*, but he had to do it for free since they'd run out of concept money. Byrd gets the gig and reimagines Broadway art. Again … accident.

You didn't have to be a genius (which I am not) to see that there was a book here. Which was lucky for me because, as odd as it seems, no one has ever really told Byrd's story. Maybe nobody asked, or maybe it fell through the cracks. I didn't go into this wanting to write a book, I just needed a guest for my show, and Byrd was a famous music guy I knew. Another accident.

Byrd's life story has all the makings of a Hollywood biopic: a glamorous, monied, and deeply flawed childhood filled with drunken parents and neglect. Hippie communes, life-threatening car crashes, big names, and even bigger drugs. Byrd spent the 1970s creating seminal artwork for rock and Broadway, only to wake up facedown on a Manhattan sidewalk. There's no limit to how low this story goes. Then he embarked on a life-saving exodus to Los Angeles, where the only crash pad is sharing bunk beds with a nine-year-old kid. Byrd then experienced a proverbial rebirth, courtesy of a successful methadone treatment and a lifelong partnership with a man twenty years his junior. But through all the highs of a Grammy and the lows of skin popping, Byrd never stopped working. To this day, he has missed exactly one deadline, and he can't stop flogging himself for it.

The biggest challenge in creating this book was filtering the immense number of stories and images. I never realized the depth of Byrd's portfolio until I asked him to discuss the fascinating album covers he created for Vanguard Records in the '70s. He couldn't remember a goddamn one of them. Most of us are lucky to do one noteworthy thing in our life; Byrd has them stacked so high that whole categories get lost. (For the record, the album covers never did make it into this book.)

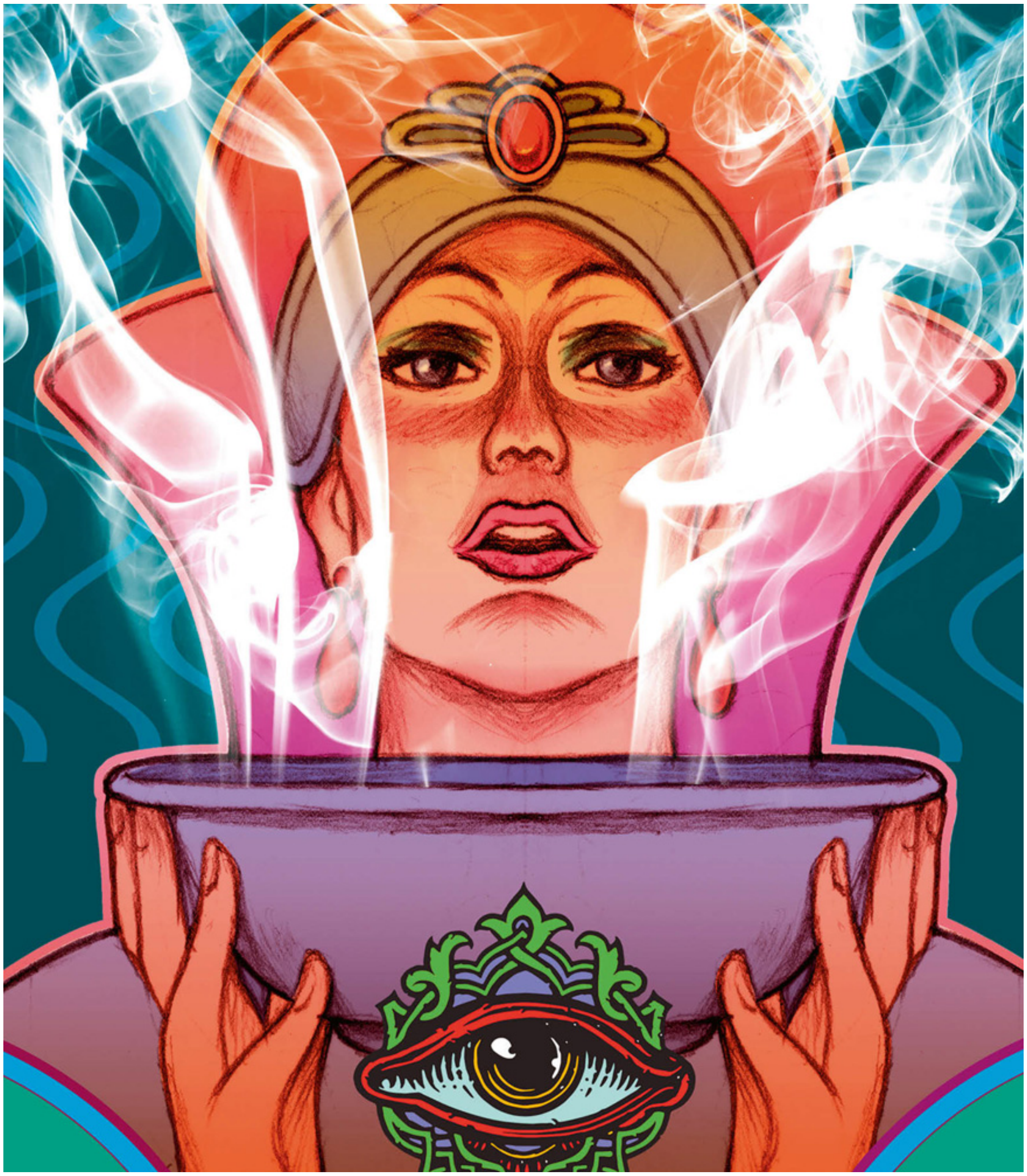
Going back to the beginning and that dinner party, a few great things came from that chance encounter. I ended up marrying that cutie from Wisconsin, and we're going on thirty years. And I was also brought into the orbit of David Edward Byrd, and I am beyond honored to reintroduce his artwork to the world. In the end, I'd love to say this volume was the result of a grand strategy. But it all came together, as fantastic journeys often do … by accident.

Byrd in 1966

Alive & Well & Underground

Byrd in his New York studio, 1970

Byrd in 1968



Inset of Byrd’s 2020 poster of the Moody Blues

MIAMI
BEACH

1941–1959

Born in humble Tennessee, a parental divorce finds David Edward Byrd growing up in the tropical splendor of 1950s Miami Beach. While life among the cocktail set in his parents' architecturally significant "House of Tomorrow" seemed glamorous, there was a dark undertone in the household, and it's precisely this combination of beauty and dysfunction that will forever shadow Byrd's art and life.

Robert von Goeben: You're from Miami Beach, right?

David Edward Byrd: I was raised there, but I was born in Cleveland, Tennessee. My mother split from my birth father, Willis, and then married a well-to-do guy, Albree Miller, who was a vice president of Howard Johnson's restaurants. He's the one who built the Miami Beach house we lived in; the "House of Tomorrow," as I called it. All my friends in high school used to make fun of my house because it was so moderne, and everybody else lived in Spanish-style houses.

RVG: So, he had money.

DEB: Yeah, yeah, I never saw any of it, but yeah, I figure he did. And my mother, Veta, had all the furs and diamonds she had always wanted. So she was happy.

RVG: You grew up in this fancy house, so did you go to private school?

DEB: No, I went to Miami Beach High. I took art classes, and I also took drama classes, so I was always leaning in the artistic direction. My art teacher had gone to Carnegie Tech, as it was called in those days. So I just decided I would apply to that school and a few others. I applied to five art schools and got into all of them, but I decided to go to Carnegie Tech—though I don't remember what the exact reason was.

RVG: So you were in the arty crowd in high school?

DEB: Well yeah, I was kind of a BMOC in high school at the time. And I couldn't wait to get out of Miami Beach. I loved it 'cause it was so deco, but it was also very provincial in a strange way. I believed there was another world out there for me to discover.

RVG: What year did you graduate high school?

DEB: 1959.

RVG: What was Florida like in the fifties?

DEB: It was nice, a laid-back, hometown kind of place. It was show biz, with big hotels providing showrooms for the stars. I lived on a private island. So you had to go over a little bridge to get there from the MacArthur Causeway. I would have to walk down to the middle of the island to catch the school bus.

RVG: What was the name of the island?

DEB: Palm Island. I lived across the street from Al Capone. Literally. I vaguely remember when he passed away because they let him go home from prison before he died of venereal disease. They had a big funeral there, with all the mobsters in attendance. After he died, the house went on the market, and my stepfather took us to look at it. We were the first people to have a tour. My stepfather was pretending he was going to buy it, as usual.

RVG: What was it like inside?

DEB: Well, it was Italianate but of the cheesy sort. There were copies of nude statues around the Olympic-sized pool. Inside the house he had this fabulous bathroom that was all black tile with gold fixtures. One wall was all mirrored panels with rosettes, and when you pushed this certain rosette on the wall, there was a tunnel leading straight down to his Chris-Craft Coronado speedboat on the bay for a quick getaway.

RVG: From the bathroom?

DEB: From his bathroom, which was a very festive mobster touch.

RVG: As a child, did you have friends on the island?

DEB: Yeah, I did. Prior to 1955, we lived on Hibiscus Island, one bridge over from Palm Island—the two islands existed almost as one. The house on Hibiscus was near Lou Walters's house [booking agent, theatrical producer, and the founder of the famed Latin Quarter nightclub], where his daughter, the future icon Barbara Walters grew up and where I learned to swim.

RVG: Is she about your age?

DEB: No, Barbara was about a decade older. She was my brother Bobby's age, and they were in the same homeroom class. In the middle of Palm Island was Lou Walters's Latin Quarter, the Miami Beach version of the New York Latin Quarter in Times Square. And so there were big stars performing there every season at the Latin Quarter, like Mae West and her bodybuilders' act. My mother brought me autographed cards from many of the performers she saw at the clubs.

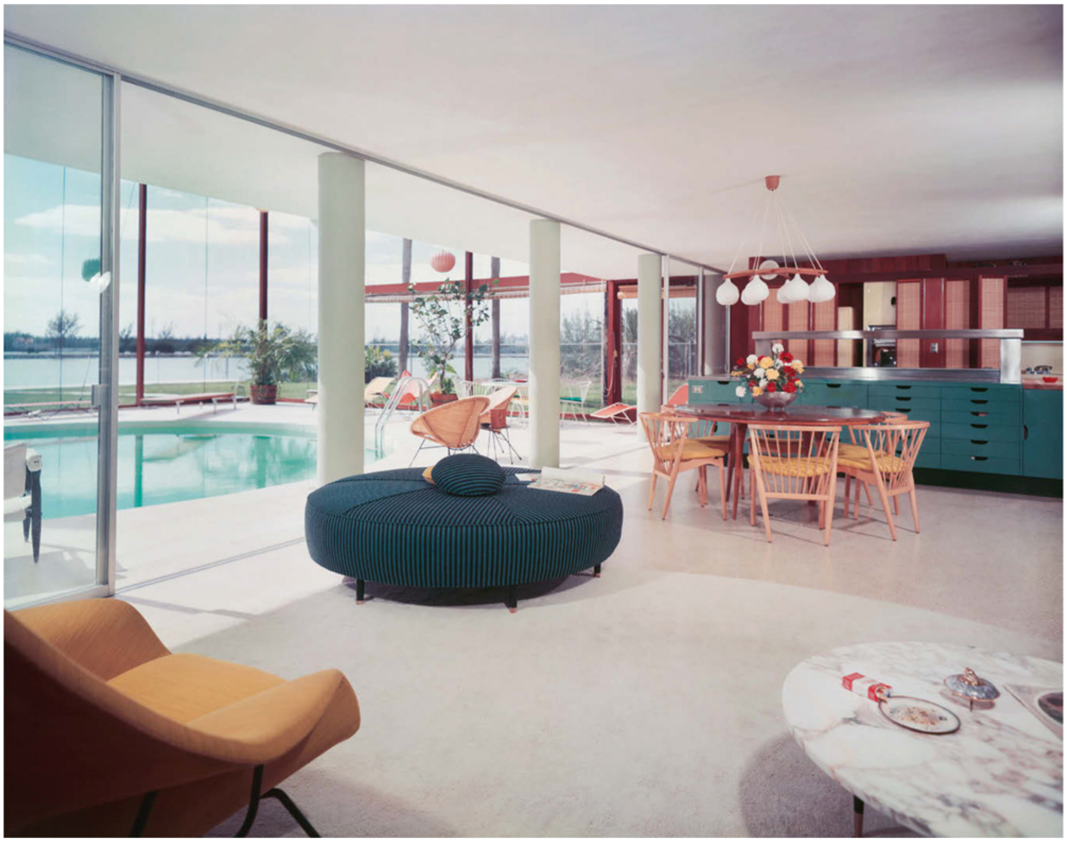
RVG: I've heard of the Latin Quarter, but I didn't know it was run by Barbara Walters's father.

DEB: Yes, that was her father. And you know, he was a big macher there in those days. He was a very big deal, and their house was a deco dream.

Byrd's father, Willis Byrd

Byrd's mother, Veta Mount Byrd Miller

Young David Edward Byrd, pictured here ca. 1945, was born inTennessee. Byrd's mother remarried, and he moved to Miami Beach, where he would grow up.



Byrd's childhood home was built by his stepfather, Albree "Al" Miller, an executive with Howard Johnson restaurants. The house, dubbed by Byrd as the "House of Tomorrow," is now demolished but was featured in many architectural magazines. Byrd vividly recalls the celebrated architectural photographer Ezra Stroller coming to photograph the house: "He was a big deal top-of-the-line photographer. It was the first time I saw a true bohemian with a beard and leather bag!"

RVG: Did your family take you to shows like the big floor shows when you were a kid?

DEB: No, but we had parties at our House of Tomorrow that were quite glam. But going out with my parents? No. I felt they weren't much interested in me at all. I felt like property. In my teen years it was almost a blessing. My parents *never* came to any function at any school I ever attended, and I was very glad about it.

RVG: Do you have siblings?

DEB: Well, I have stepsisters and stepbrothers. They're all dead except one, Dorothy, whom I just spoke with. She has lung cancer, which is thankfully now in remission. We've remained very close, and she and her late husband, Ciro, have always been very supportive of me.

RVG: These were his from a previous marriage?

DEB: Yes, he had two former wives: three boys were from wife number one, and two girls were from wife number two. I came as part of the wife-number-three package since my mother was a gorgeous bumpkin from Alabama who had moved up to Cleveland, Tennessee, north of Chattanooga. My biological father, Willis Byrd, met her while she worked the box office of the Bohemia Theatre, which had one aisle down the middle, with wooden seats on each side. The standing joke concerning the Bohemia was that you had to buy two popcorns, one for you and one for the rats.

RVG: She was a trophy wife?

DEB: Yes. She was a trophy wife, and my new stepfather taught her everything. He sent her to modeling school so she would know how to walk and stand, talk, and be charming, and all that.

RVG: And what was his name?

DEB: Albree Miller, known as Al.

RVG: Did you get along well with him?

DEB: Yes and no. I tried to ignore him. He was really strict and mean to his real children, but he wasn't as mean to me, I think because I wasn't part of his sperm, as it were. He was very mean to them, and most of them ran away or left when they reached maturity. My youngest stepbrother, Bobby, who's eight years older, went into the navy, and then my oldest brother, David Miller, was a CIA agent, something we never knew about until his retirement from the service. And then the middle brother, Paul, was actually thrown out by my stepfather because he thought he was a "faggot" [Al's term]. That's what he called him all the time, because he liked classical music, art, and cinema, and he whistled a lot. I remember when Bobby and I helped Paul escape to live in a little trailer in North Miami. He eventually married a girl from Detroit named Anne.

RVG: Did your sexual orientation come into play yet?

DEB: Not yet. I never even conceived of such things until I started my nude male magazine collection, which lived in my underwear drawer. [*laughs*]

RVG: You were a red-blooded American male?

DEB: Yeah, until I wasn't. [*laughs*] We had these big parties at our house, with people like the vice president of US Steel. We had a party for him. Everybody would get really bombed and jump off the balcony into the pool with their clothes on. It was pretty wacky.

RVG: And so here you are, it's the fifties, your parents are having these swinging parties, and you're this arty kid. Where were you while this was going on? Were you involved, did you go out and see people, or did you stay away?

DEB: When I was older, I was the bartender. I learned to make really good drinks. They all thought I was cute 'cause I had a little navy blue suit that I would wear with a red bow tie. And I made a mean gin sling!

RVG: What happened to the house?

DEB: It was a pretty famous house at the time of its debut in 1955. It's gone now; it was demolished. Our house was designed by the famous architect Rufus Nims and was featured in architectural magazines quite a bit. Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, wife of Frank Lloyd Wright, brought the senior class from Taliesin West to see our house. She was a very picturesque, tall woman wearing a long black robe, and her hair in a tight chignon, as I recall. Miami had become this really glam international watering hole, you know? But today, everything I knew is gone on Palm Island. It was razed to the ground and filled with bloated McMansions. It's a very, very depressing place.

RVG: So, all those old houses got torn down?

DEB: Yeah, like 17 Shangri-La, that was Barbara Walters's house. It was very deco; I loved that house. I learned to swim at her house. Matty Rosenhaus, the Geritol magnate, subsequently purchased it.

RVG: Would you say that growing up in that kind of aesthetic had a big influence on you as an artist?

DEB: Oh yeah. Miami Beach, I never really got over the art deco thing; it just kind of swamped my brain. That's the part I loved, the old Miami. A "wonderful isle of dreams." In fact, a local radio station was named WIOD for "Wonderful Isle of Dreams." All those hotels that are now so beloved are down there on South Beach. We called that "Bagel Beach" when I was in high school, because that's where all the old yentas would come in the winter and stay in those hotels, which were kosher. Or, as they would say, "glatt." You know, it was a glatt hotel. And you got a whole kosher deal; it was like you got the whole winter season, kosher meals and everything Yiddishkeit in one package at one of those little deco hotels that were all beige-colored, with porches for the yentas to sit on and kibitz.

RVG: Like the Fontainebleau?

DEB: Oh no—the Fontainebleau was a glam hotel for the rich. Sinatra sang there! These were little beige hotels that were for the Jews of the North. And no one sang there; they just kibitzed all day. And the Fontainebleau had not even been conceived of. That property was originally the Harvey Firestone estate.

RVG: At what point, as a kid in Miami Beach living in this fabulous fifties house, did you think, *Art is my thing*?

DEB: Through most of high school I kept telling people I was gonna be an orthodontist, isn't that weird? I had a lot of girlfriends who had braces, so I thought, *That would be a great job, making bucktoothed girls look glamorous*. I thought I was going to be an orthodontist until the tenth grade. Then I realized I really liked art, and I really liked acting. I acted in all the class plays and created as much art as I could. And I did a running cartoon for the school newspaper for three years. Plus, I had a side job of creating bejeweled powder rooms for my neighbors on the island with oil paint and rhinestones.

RVG: Do you still have the high school newspaper cartoons?

DEB: Oh gosh, no. I wish I had all those teenage things, but when I got out of Dodge, I just left everything behind … including my sanity, it appears.

RVG: Maybe somebody saved those old school newspapers.

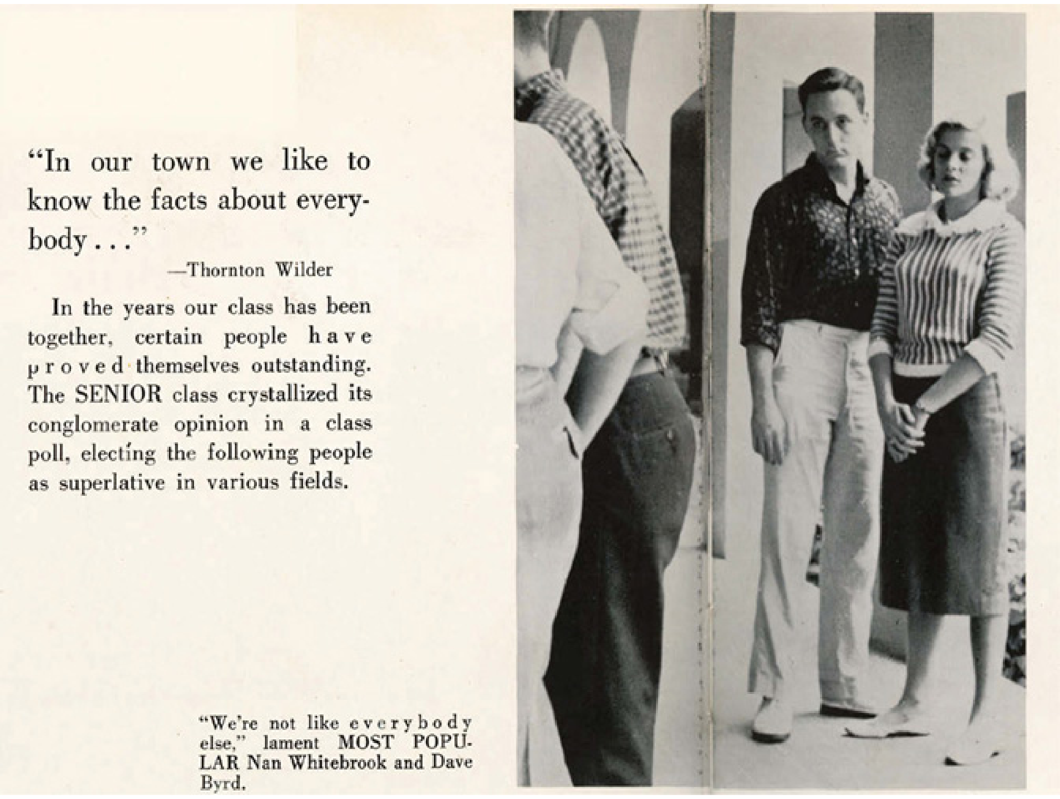
DEB: Oh, also, I left behind my then-girlfriend, Jane Rubin—her brother became the treasury secretary under [Bill] Clinton.

RVG: Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin was your girlfriend's brother?

DEB: Older brother, he was two years older.

Byrd with his stepsiblings on Palm Island, Florida

Byrd's mother, Veta Mount Byrd Miller, reflects a happier time. After a long and troubled life, she succumbed to alcohol and pills and died at age forty-three.



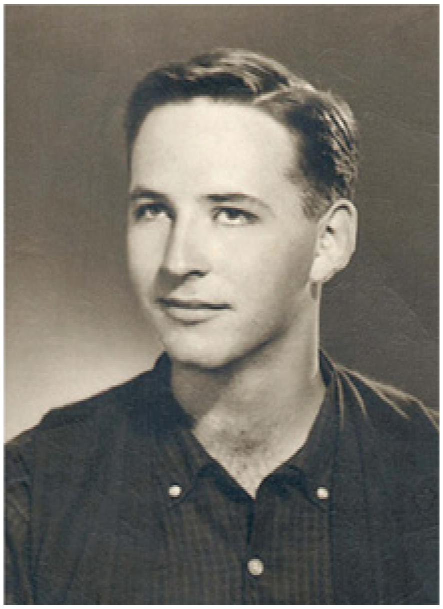
"In our town we like to know the facts about everybody . . ."

—Thornton Wilder

In the years our class has been together, certain people have proved themselves outstanding. The SENIOR class crystallized its conglomerate opinion in a class poll, electing the following people as superlative in various fields.

"We're not like everybody else," lament MOST POPULAR Nan Whitebrook and Dave Byrd.

Byrd in his 1959 high school yearbook; a self-described "big man on campus," he was voted most popular.



Byrd photographed in Cuernavaca, Mexico, 1958.

-NOTICE-
"HOTEL CATALINA"
BAR AND DINING ROOM IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.
-AVISO-
"HOTEL CATALINA"
CANTINA Y COMEDOR
ABIERTO AL PUBLICO.

Byrd (seated) on vacation with a friend in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, 1958.

RVG: So this was real blue-blood stuff, huh?

DEB: Blue blood would be WASPs. Jews are not blue bloods. One had to have very white-white skin with the veins showing through, plus a neurasthenic disposition, in order to be called a "blue blood."

RVG: Are you Jewish?

DEB: Yes and no, but I feel like I'm Jewish because of where I grew up. I know more Yiddish than most people. I went to all their bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs.

RVG: Were you raised religious at all?

DEB: No, no.

RVG: Did your parents practice any religion?

DEB: I think they called themselves congregationalists, and I don't even know what that is. My parents were secretly anti-Semitic, but they had a lot of Jewish friends.

RVG: Would they make comments on the side?

DEB: Yeah. "Oh, he's a kike." You know, that kind of thing.

RVG: And how would that strike you?

DEB: I thought it was pretty disgusting. Everybody I knew was Jewish, so I felt like I was Jewish. And I went to synagogue sometimes with my buddies and girlfriends.

RVG: Just because that's where your friends went?

DEB: Yeah, Beth Israel synagogue. I loved seeing the Torah; I thought it was funny that women had to sit separately.

RVG: It didn't create any religious tendencies in you?

DEB: No! I knew stuff about Judaism, but I didn't want to be a rabbi.

RVG: You wanted to be an orthodontist.

DEB: [*laughs*] I wanted to be an orthodontist. Right.

RVG: So, it's 1959, you had this art teacher who had gone to Carnegie, so you applied. What other art schools did you apply to?

DEB: Cooper Union, ArtCenter in Los Angeles, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and also the one at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. But I got into Carnegie Tech and decided to go there in 1959.

CARNEGIE
TECH

Byrd works on a painting in his senior painting cubicle at Carnegie Tech. Byrd was told by his professor that he occupied the space that Andy Warhol used when he attended Tech. At the time, no one knew much about Warhol, as he had not emerged yet as a major art figure. Note Byrd's close-up drawing of a head in the background, a style he would later become famous for with his designs for Jimi Hendrix, Follies, *and* Godspell.

1959–1969

Out of high school, Byrd lands at Carnegie Tech's prestigious art college, but a horrific accident sidelines his education, and a painful convalescence introduces him to a new muse: drugs. His story of contrasts continues as he finds great success in art school while trying to manage his mother's addictions. By the late '60s, Byrd's emerging creativity will lead him into a hippie commune and ultimately to New York City.

Robert von Goeben: You went to college at Carnegie Tech, right?

David Edward Byrd: Yeah, but right before that I went to Pittsburgh to work. My stepfather knew this guy who owned a steel mill, Frank Jessup, so I worked my first summer at Jessup Steel in Washington, Pennsylvania. I went there in June, and I worked on the mechanical labor pool. Boy, coming from Miami Beach, it was like, wow, what a difference! I was eighteen and not physically in shape for what I was asked to do, and I was all alone in this tiny mill town thirty miles from Pittsburgh.

RVG: What did you do?

DEB: I did a lot of shit work in the steel mill, like knocking the bricks out in the annealing ovens in two-hundred-degree heat while gobbling salt pills, cleaning the acid vats in rubber waders and gas masks, degreasing the grease tunnels with scrapers. Even worse, I had to knock "slag" out of test ladles, which was a bitch to do! I worked at Jessup for two years, my freshman and sophomore years at art school, and my savings paid for a good deal of school. By my second summer at Jessup, I got to be the senior guy working in the mechanical labor pool. When I started out, I could only get the crappy jobs, which were *really* crappy. I should mention that a "Class A" job at twenty dollars per hour meant that you could read words like "Stop" and "Start." Many of the workers could not read. Because I was a stranger and a bit goofy, many of the labor pool workers kind of made me their mascot. A couple of them caught me reading a paperback on yoga, which they probably thought was a sandwich because they nicknamed me "Hoagy." Rocket scientists, they were not! During my first summer at Jessup, I would come home to my little rented room in the perfectly preserved 1940s house of Mr. and Mrs. Nett, my landlords. I would lie on the rug in my room until 6 am and trudge back to work without even changing my clothes. I was so exhausted! In the bathroom that I shared with the Netts, there were two rolls of toilet paper hung one on top of the other with little handwritten descriptives. There was "Guest Paper" over the cheap one-ply gas station paper, and "Mr. & Mrs. Nett's Private Paper" over the three-ply fluffy paper. I always used the Nett's paper, of course. At night Mrs. Nett would hear my little radio and yell from upstairs, "The radio is for you, Mr. Byrd, not for us!"

RVG: And those steel mill earnings were enough to pay for school?

DEB: Yeah, because art school was five hundred dollars a semester. Al Miller, my step-father, didn't want to pay for it because I insisted on studying art. My guess is, to him an artistic career is an iffy income stream, but income was the last thing on my mind at this pivotal point in my life.

RVG: So you entered Carnegie in, what, 1959?

DEB: Yes, I was just a Miami Beach boy who was incredibly fearful of a lot of things, particularly concerning my homosexuality, which I considered a hidden blight on my character. Why was I afflicted with this disease? But then, in my first year during Thanksgiving break, I decided to go with my roommate, Peter Nevard, to New York City, where I'd never been. We paid a guy from the engineering school for a ride in his old 1948 Oldsmobile … with bald tires, unbeknownst to us. On the way, we had an auto wreck, and we skidded off the turnpike. I was riding shotgun and fell out of the car, and the car landed on top of me. The first thing I remember was them rolling the car off of me. It was raining, and I remember my nostrils were barely above the water. I could have drowned! I was taken to this tiny two-hundred-bed hospital in the town of McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania. I had broken two vertebrae in my neck and cracked my pelvis and tailbone. The doctors screwed bolts into my skull, which they connected to ropes and attached to weights that pulled my spine apart. I was in the hospital for six months.

RVG: Wow! This was Thanksgiving of your freshman year?

DEB: Yeah, my freshman year. In the emergency room I experienced cardiac arrest, and they used an electric device [defibrillator] on my chest to restart my heart, which was severely bruised from the weight of the car on my back.

RVG: They had to restart your heart?

DEB: Restart my heart, yeah. I never knew it till sometime afterward.

RVG: Did you miss a lot of school?

DEB: I missed my first year and had to start over. I started art school over again, and in four more years, I graduated.

RVG: Wow. Did you create any art during that time in the hospital?

DEB: Oh no. I was on this special bed and could only look up. My stepfather paid for round-the-clock nurses, which meant I was not alone all day and night. My day nurse, Ida, was this really funny gal, and she helped get me through it all by sending out for double cheeseburgers on a regular basis.

RVG: What was that like?

DEB: It was horrible! Number one, I became addicted to the painkillers, which I received every four hours. I was always “waiting for the man,” or in this case, the nurse. That shot was my reason for living, which all addicts experience. They slowly took me off the opiates, but it was really difficult, and I never fully got over that streak of addiction. Plus, I was extraordinarily depressed because there was nobody to interact with but my nurse, Ida. All I could do was look up at the ceiling and wait for my next opiate injection. Then my body atrophied, so I had to relearn to walk and use my arms. I had to carry a bucket of water to correct the paralysis in my right arm, which never moved in the six months I was in the hospital.

RVG: Would your family come visit at all?

DEB: They came once, on their way to Paris.

RVG: In six months they only came once?

DEB: They came once, and they were both drunk! I don’t know if anyone else noticed, but I just knew it. It was kind of depressing, but it was par for the course. When I was in my late teens, I had another intestinal hemorrhage and had to be hospitalized for transfusions. My mother came to visit me and passed out in my hospital bed. The nurses had to remove her. But in the middle of my hospital stay, my birth father, Willis Byrd, came all the way from Tennessee to spend a month at my bedside. When I remember this now I well up with tears—but at the time I was full of anger at both my parents for reasons I will not hash out here. So, when my dad came to my bedside, I wish now I had been nicer. I would see my dad for three months every year in his handmade log cabin deep in the woods of East Tennessee, and then spend the rest of the time at my stepfather’s glamorous modern villa in Florida. I have compassion for my poor benighted mother, but I have a very deep love for my father, Willis. He was a very loving man that unfortunately loved all the wrong women. I particularly disliked my stepmother Margaret, Willis’ second wife, who was a neurasthenic mess.

RVG: Were you a different person when you came out and went back to school? Contrast entering the second year with your first year.

DEB: I was very different, just an emotional mess. I think I was just angry, angry, angry. I didn’t like myself a lot. Actually, I would say I hated myself!

So much of what happened to me was overlapping, I'm still trying to make sense of it all. Plus, I never really got over those six months of morphine. I was always thinking about opiates.

RVG: This would have been the early sixties?

DEB: I started college again in the class of '60–'61, but inside I felt like I was heading for the abyss. I was continually thinking about death, about famous suicides, drug addicts, and alcoholics.

RVG: Which drugs were around, and what did you get into?

DEB: Oh, uppers, downers, blackbirds, black beauties, Tuinal, marijuana, heroin, and various little things like Percodan, which I adored. At the time, you could buy paregoric, a lovely opium product, over the counter at the drugstore. I always kept a bottle in my backpack for a pick-me-up.

RVG: What was the drug culture like at Carnegie in 1961?

DEB: I knew people who were into heavy dope; some of them were kind of lowlifes, not college kids. They came from New York and Chicago and urban places. They were hip and somewhat unapproachable to me. There wasn't really a big drug culture on campus that I knew of. I mean, we would have some drug parties and even some nudist parties. Later on, I learned there was a group of drama students who played around with opioids, but my main focus was on speed, speed, speed. I think I took speed every day for twenty years. I was so driven to be recognized by my peers as a good artist that I needed speed to keep me going.

RVG: Were you about the only student in that kind of thing?

DEB: No, there were a few others. Like my girlfriend at the time.

RVG: Did your drug habits affect your ability to make your way through art school?

DEB: Not at all. I did struggle a little at the beginning because I didn't have the prior training like many of the kids in my class. They had been doing art forever, it seemed. I had no idea what I was doing, but I was a voracious learner and a quick study. I just absorbed as much as I could from everyone and everything. I worked every minute, drawing every chance I could get. I graduated with a 4.0 average, and I got an award for the only person who had all A's for the four years that I matriculated. I became what the college called a "Founders Scholar." I was arrogant enough to think I had gotten away with something.

RVG: Talk about your actual studies at Carnegie Tech. What were you excited about?

DEB: At first, my focus was on acquiring technique. In retrospect, I can see how much more I learned from my peers than from my teachers. Also, I now see how important it is to fall in love with the work of another artist. Since I was a painting major, I first wanted to be Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, whose highly emotional paintings came from a rather dark vision. I really wanted to do big paintings, and I did. My thesis painting was eight feet by ten feet. In the end, I really wanted to emulate Francis Bacon. I wanted to create large canvases that pitted flat surfaces against organic images.

RVG: How was your technique at that point?

DEB: My technique got better, and it turned out I could draw better than I thought I could. A big problem was that I had no color sense. Color is a mysterious thing, and it would take my entire life to really feel comfortable and secure about color, which I feel to be a very personal thing.

RVG: When you were at Carnegie, do you remember a point where you thought, *Oh look, I have a style. I have a voice. This is me*.

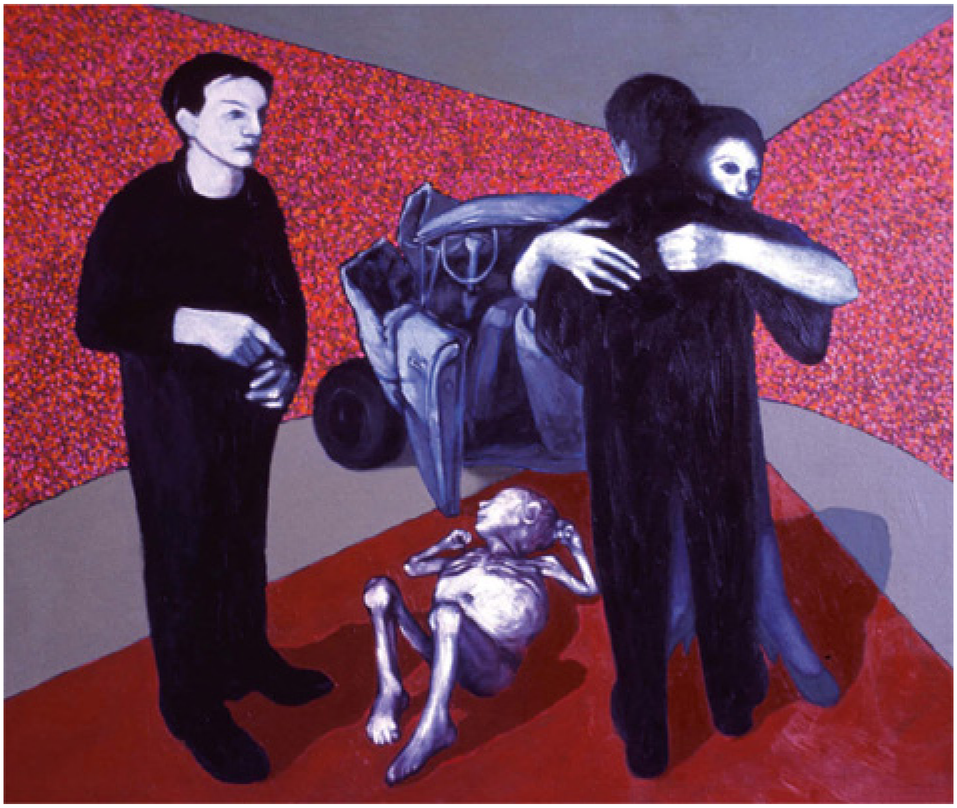
DEB: Yeah, that happened in my undergraduate senior year in painting. I really felt I had developed my own style, and I felt excited about what I was doing. I mean, every time I did a painting, I was so very jazzed.

RVG: Say more about your influences at the time.

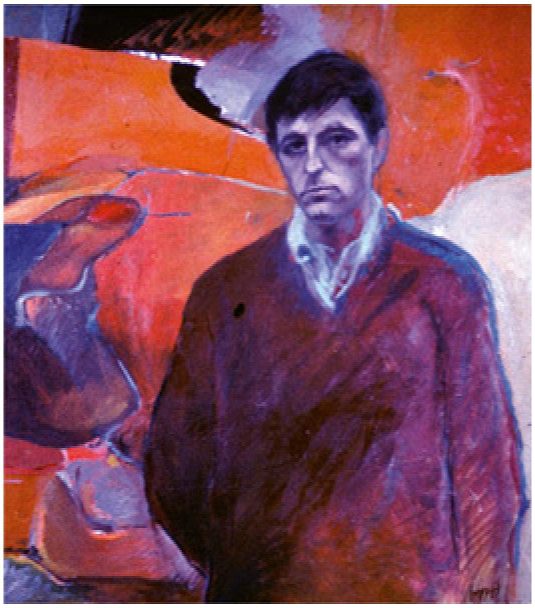
DEB: Well, it was heavily influenced by Francis Bacon, of course. Here's a story—at the end of my sophomore year, I went with three friends to Rome, where we stayed for the summer in Old Rome near the Colosseum on Via Labicana. There were three of us: Peter Nevard [Byrd's roommate from the accident], Nina Franklin [Peter's girlfriend], and Tom Potocki [a painting pal]. When we flew back to the US, I remember two things: First, I was sitting across from actress Gloria Swanson, who would become part of my *Follies* poster experience eight years later. And second, the man piloting the plane had previously been my sexual partner in a Roman movie theater! I even remember that the film starred Elizabeth Taylor and Robert Taylor, but I cannot tell you anything about the plot, for obvious reasons. And when we landed in New York City, the first thing we all did was attend the opening of the big Francis Bacon retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum. I would never be the same again after that show. It just blew me away. I mean, I wept! Because the paintings were just so gorgeous. This may sound funny, but I had found the person I wanted to be—I wished I could just meld into his being and get drunk and fuck George Dyer, Bacon's lover, who was a burglar that had crashed through the skylight in Bacon's studio to rob him but stayed to become Francis's fierce sexual comrade and physical muse. I realize now that this was a necessary moment that most young artists experience: falling in love with another artist's work—much like having a guru or an avatar. I had a similar experience with Edvard Munch and his melancholic oeuvre.

RVG: Your amazing school experience was ending. What was next?

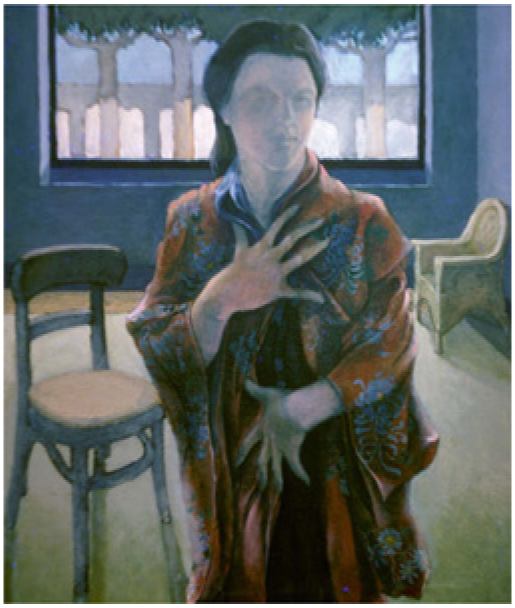
DEB: In my senior year at Carnegie Tech, I did a painting called *The Party*. I didn't realize it at the time, but it obviously referred to an episode where my mother killed a man with our car. She had just gotten the car from the valet at the Dupont Plaza Hotel in Miami. As she got in the car, it started to roll forward, and when she went to hit the brake, she hit the accelerator instead. The car raced up the grand staircase and through the plate glass doors of the hotel. Along the way, it hit a man and dragged him into the lobby. The next day, it was front page headlines in the *Miami Herald* newspaper. After all these years, I realized this painting with the car wreck must've come from that memory. The accident cost my stepfather a lot of money—they sued for half a million dollars! My stepfather never forgave my mother. Whenever he was angry, he would call my mother "the murderer." This helped exacerbate her drinking to the breaking point, and she eventually either committed suicide or had an accidental overdose of alcohol and barbiturates. She was forty-three, and they said her liver was pretty fucked up. You know, she wasn't going to last. She would wake up and get drunk, and she was a sloppy drunk and cried a great deal. She would call me and describe the pine box she wanted me to have made for her, shit like that. It was really a hot mess.



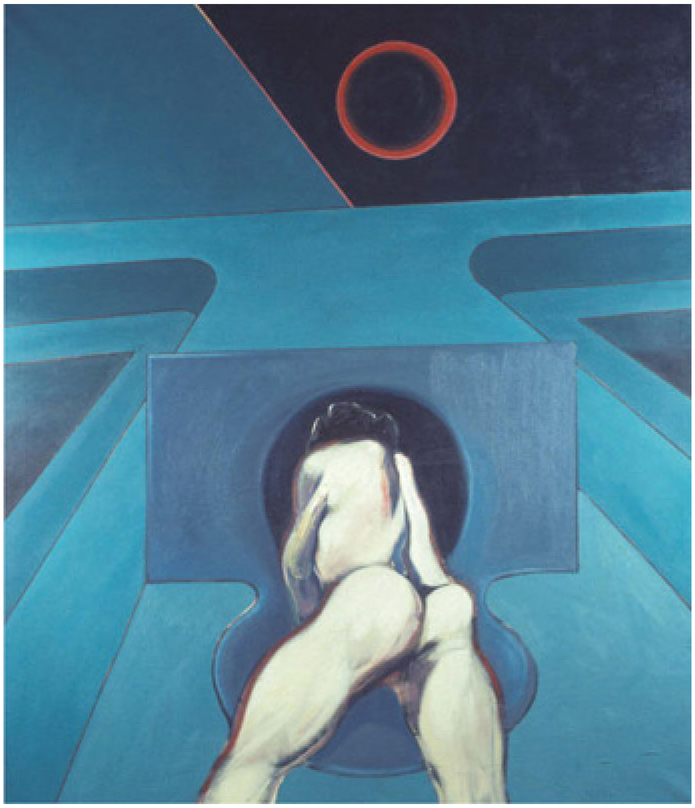
The Party, *by David Edward Byrd, 1965, was inspired by tragic car accidents that had recently happened to both him and his mother.*



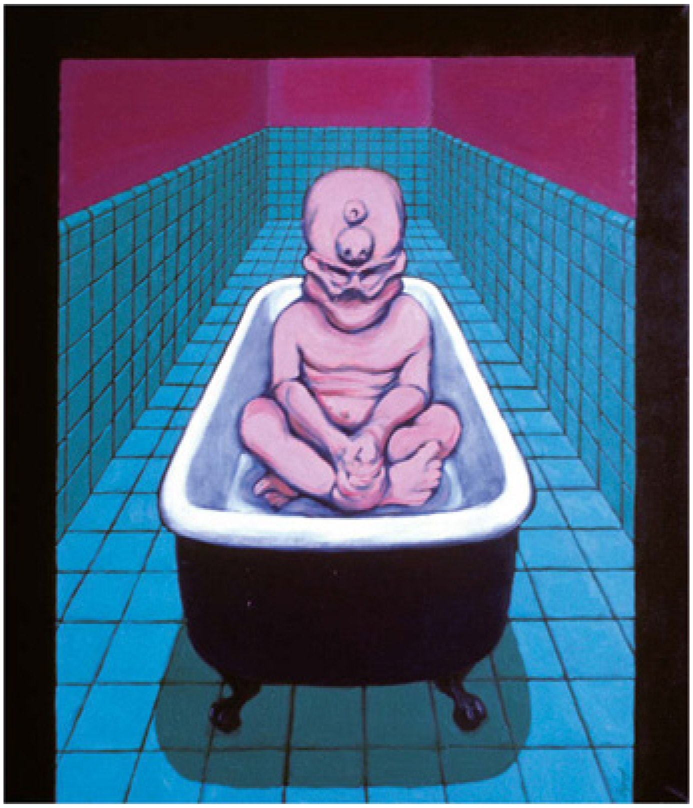
Byrd's self-portrait, 1964



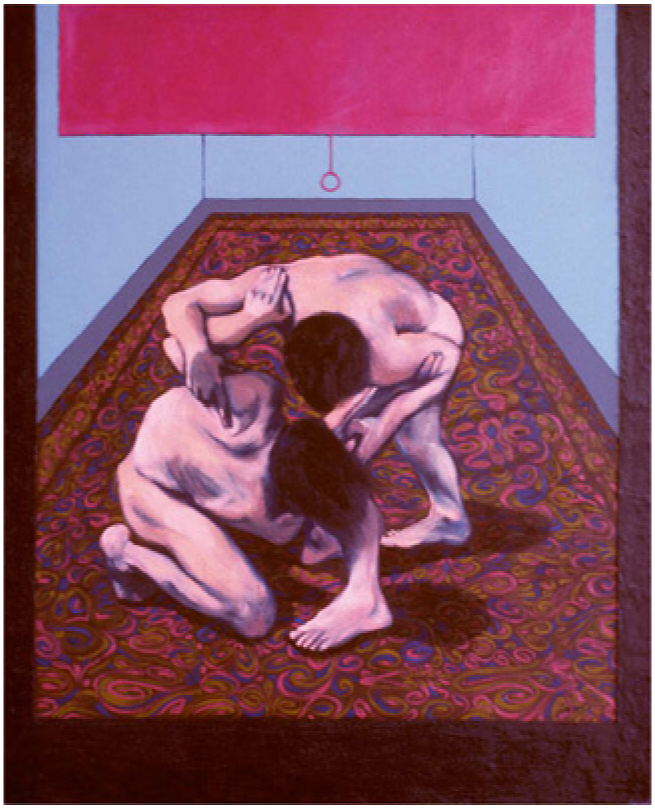
Byrd painted a portrait of his friend Anne, with whom he had his last heterosexual relationship.



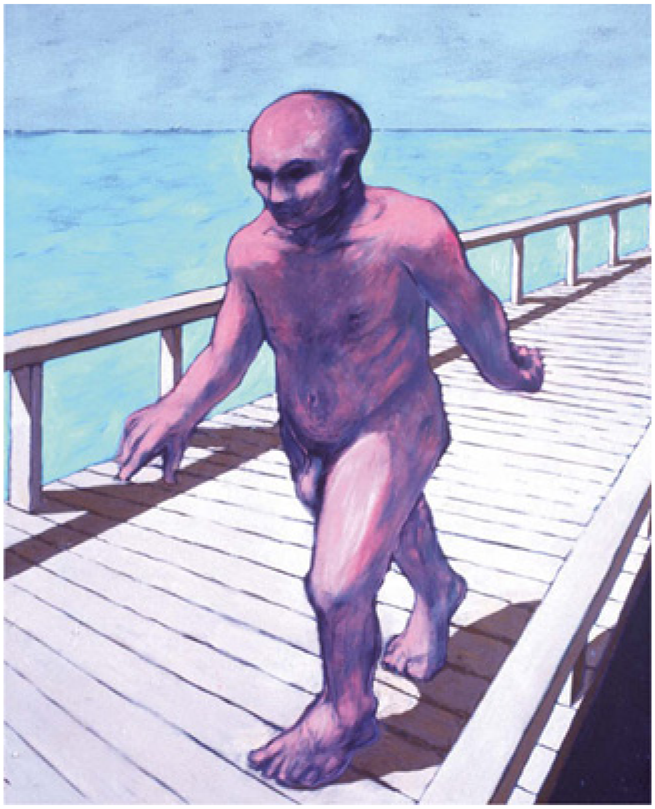
The Aperture, *by David Edward Byrd, 1966*



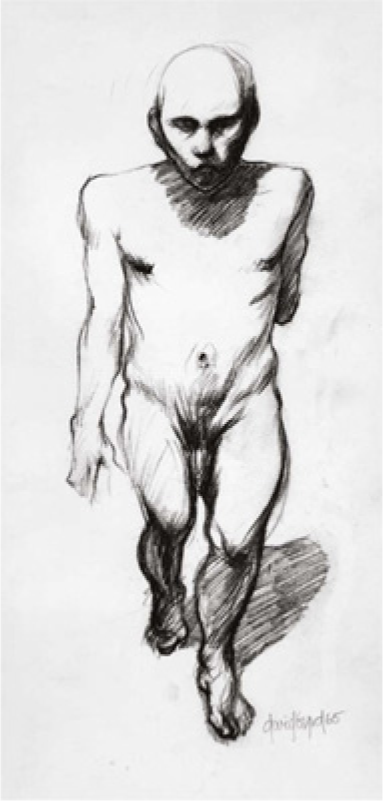
The Epiphany, *by David Edward Byrd, 1966*



The Visit, *by David Edward Byrd, 1966*



Man Walking, *by David Edward Byrd, 1965*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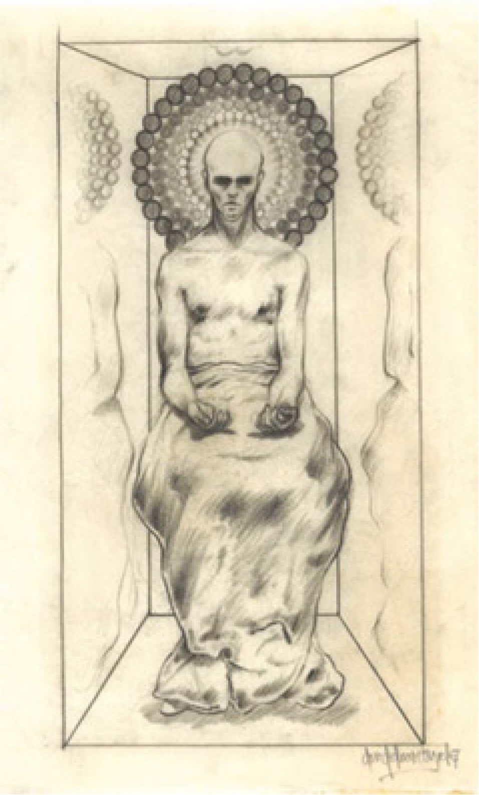
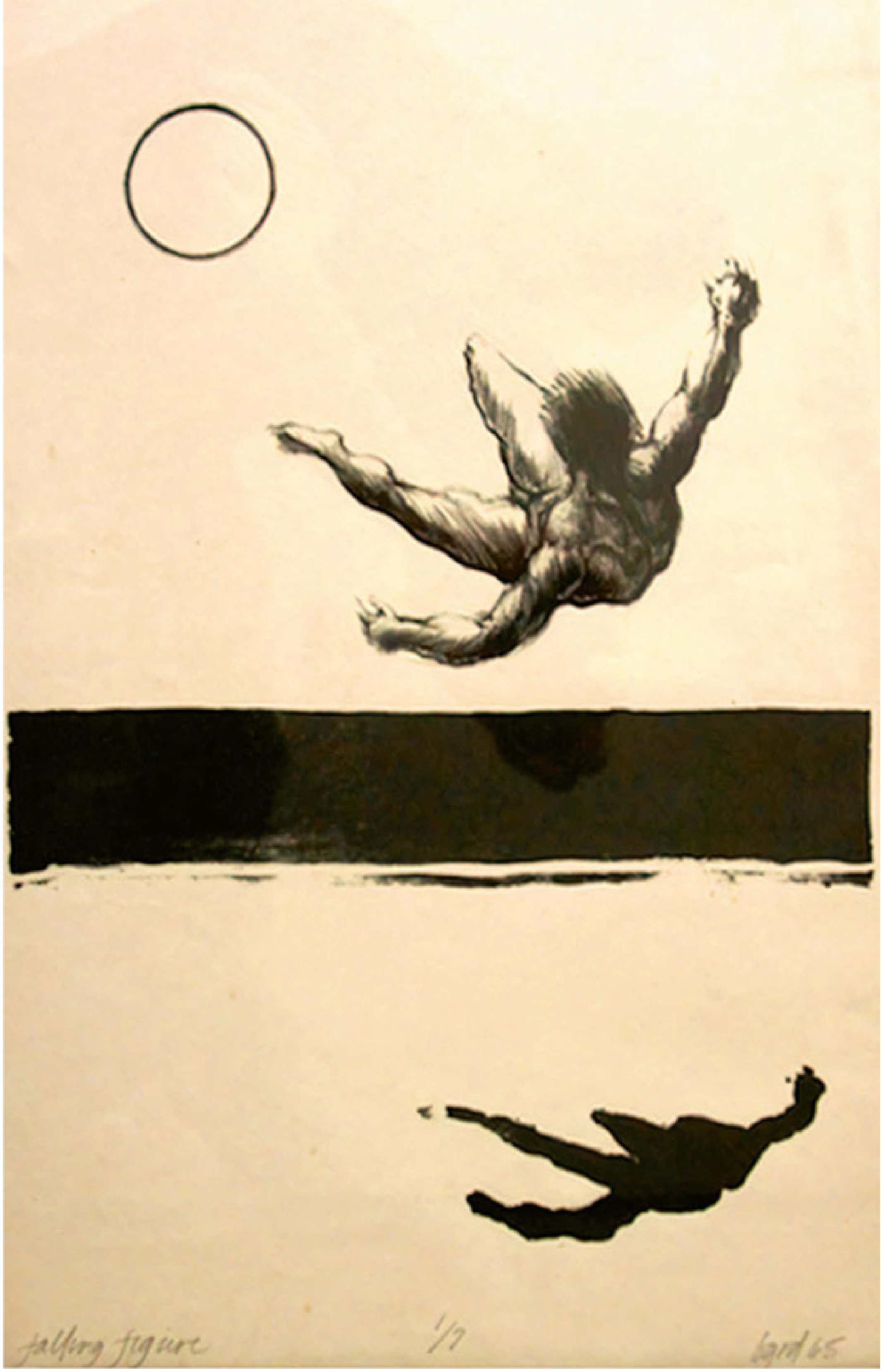
Walking Man 2, *by David Edward Byrd, 1965*



Pope Study #3, *by David Edward Byrd, 1965—during his time at Carnegie Tech, Byrd became focused on the life and politics of Pope Pius XII, who became the subject of several paintings*.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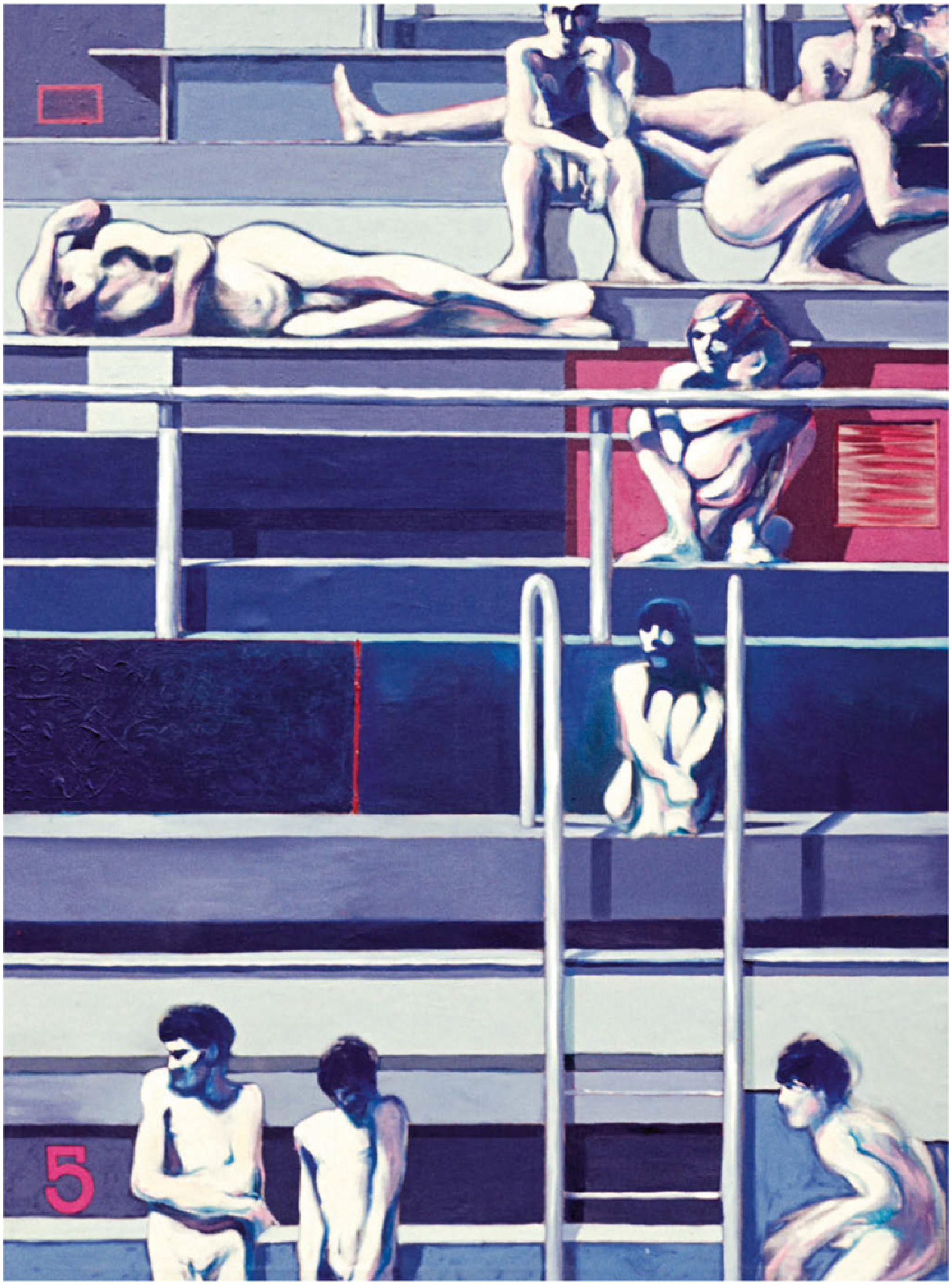
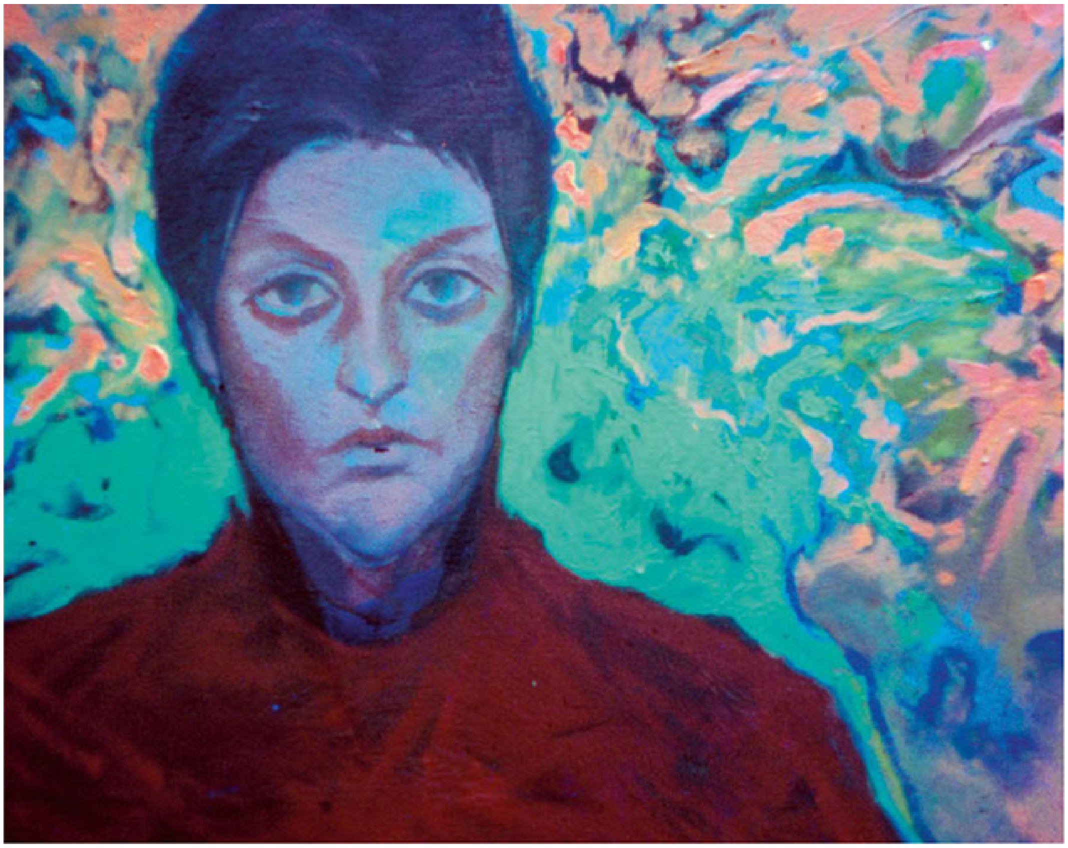
Falling Figure, *by David Edward Byrd, 1964*

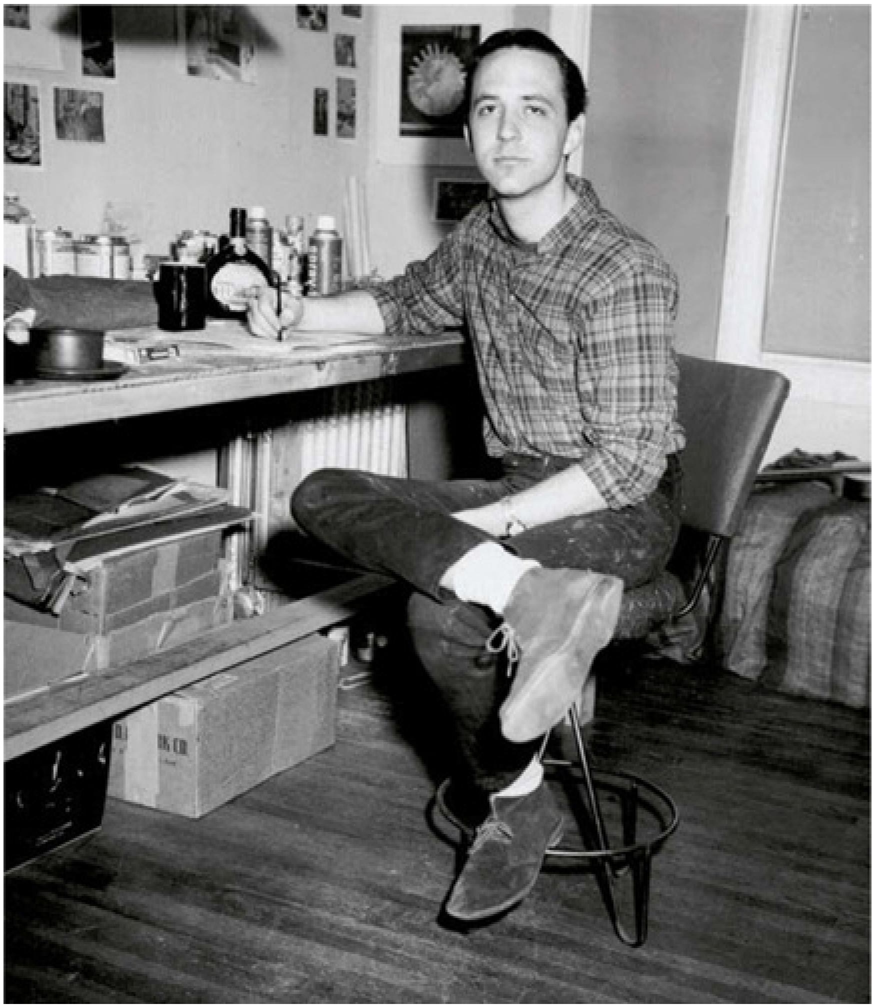


No. 5, *Byrd's 1966 senior thesis painting at Carnegie Tech University, measures eight feet by ten feet. A piece about the human condition, Byrd was considering people being rounded up and put in stadiums by fascist governments in South America.*

During his time at Carnegie, Byrd was fascinated with the human body and its iterations.



Rhoda, *by David Edward Byrd, 1965*



Byrd in 1961 in his apartment in Central Square in Boston while a student at the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts. Byrd spent a year in Boston while his mother was in rehab.

RVG: Did you find her body?

DEB: Yes. The weirdest thing was, it was on Mother's Day. I got a call from her neighbor at five am saying he was worried about her. So I went over there with some flowers for Mother's Day because I had a key to get in. I could tell right away she was dead in the bed.

RVG: Paint the scene. You walked in, what was it like?

DEB: She was in the bed with a vodka bottle, and the sleeping pills were on the bedside table. And she was not breathing.

RVG: What went through your mind at that moment?

DEB: At first, I felt nothing, I just felt numb. Then I became kind of hysterical. I was deeply depressed for a very long time after that. But going back to art school seemed to help me a lot.

RVG: How old were you when she died?

DEB: Twenty or twenty-one; it was 1962, as I recall. I was just going to start school again, because I had my own auto wreck in the fall of 1959. I recovered from that and had physical therapy and went back to Carnegie Tech. Then, after my mother's car accident, I had to leave art school again. I went to Boston to take care of her; she was at the alcohol rehab unit at Massachusetts General Hospital, where Al had sent her to get her off his hands. She had become a nuisance he could not control—drinking round the clock, hiding alcohol, passing out, all the alcoholic tropes.

RVG: You'd just come back to school, and now you had to leave again?

DEB: Yes. So, while I was taking care of her, I went back to the art school of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Ironically, I had a very successful year there and even received an award for best overall freshman student work. I immediately made friends with a group of the most talented kids. One of whom, named Anne, was my last heterosexual affair.

RVG: Were you close to your mom during that time?

DEB: It was not a pretty scene. She was the patient of a noted addiction psychiatrist. He encouraged her to go out and maybe date some men outside the hospital setting. My stepfather was not being nice, and my mother seemed to be trying to keep off the booze. So, she started dating this man who was really a great person. He was an Italian American photographer about my mother's age, and he was just a sweetheart. He treated her like she was very special, took her out dancing, took her to dinner, and brought her little gifts. Then she received this big envelope in the mail that contained several photographs taken by a private detective of her and the photographer boyfriend making out and hugging and kissing. She was really hoping to get a lot of money from my stepfather in her planned divorce. But he said to her, “You’re gettin’ nothin’.” So she broke up with her photographer friend and went back to drinking. This is so ironic because, later, when my stepfather died in 1975, his paramour got everything, and his children each got one dollar.

RVG: How long had she been out of rehab?

DEB: She had been out for about a month. Then she started seeing this guy who was a drug salesman. He gave her pharmacist-sized bottles of pills. This, after she knew she was getting nothing in the divorce. In the end, it was barbiturates and vodka that got her.

RVG: And all the while you were still recuperating from your own accident.

DEB: Yeah, I was, and then I had another gastrointestinal hemorrhage. I was supposed to go to Europe with René Auberjonois, my friend who became a very famous actor. We were gonna go see his father, Fernand Auberjonois, who was a well-known journalist. But that hemorrhage put the kibosh on my going to Europe, ’cause I had to recover. I was taken to Massachusetts General, and they did a full-scale investigation of my intestinal system, because I had my first hemorrhage when I was twelve years old. The staff decided I needed surgery, as my duodenum, which is the connection between the stomach and the small intestine, was covered in scar tissue and was about to become blocked. And if it did, it would possibly kill me.

RVG: Wait, this was at the same time as the ordeal with your mother?

DEB: Yes. [*sighs*] That was a whole other thing. My stomach had stopped working, and I had to have a hemigastrectomy and vagotomy. I saw all the gastrointestinal staff at Massachusetts General, and they agreed that the immediate surgery was necessary. So, I had a major surgery, and after that I went back to art school in Pittsburgh, where I was the only freshman without a stomach.

RVG: So here you are—you come off a major accident, and your mother is getting divorced. She's in rehab, then she dies of a drug overdose, and then you have this major stomach surgery. So much trauma in a short period of time. What was your state of mind?

DEB: Needless to say, my thoughts were very dark. I was feeling extremely sorry for myself. I began to read all these books about artists and actors who committed suicide. I mean, I just got obsessed with death for a long time. Eventually, I just started repeating a lot of the stuff my mother was involved in, like binge-drinking, taking drugs, and all that shit.

RVG: So, when you went back to school, you went right back to it?

DEB: Slowly, yes, and finally, I got arrested for shoplifting food while very high on Tuinal. I got a choice between thirty days or fifty dollars. And I was almost expelled from school, but like many addicts, I charmed my way out of it.

RVG: You didn't have any inheritance when your mother died?

DEB: No. Al said that I could have her four-carat diamond ring. He was kind of hysterical when I called him and told him she was dead. First, he said I could keep the ring, but then he wanted it back, so I said, "Oh fuck, I don't want this ring." It was a blood diamond to me. [*laughs*]

RVG: After all this shit, you go back to school at Carnegie Tech. Talk about being back.

DEB: Well, it kind of saved my life. I felt like I had to make up for lost time. I didn't like competition, but when it raised its ugly head, I would compete fiercely. I sort of surprised myself sometimes with how well I could do art. I kind of impressed myself. Each art success put off the specter of death.

RVG: You got quite a reputation as an artist at school, right?

DEB: Yeah, by the time I was a senior, I felt that I was someone who many of my classmates looked up to. I had a show in the student union that made a big splash, as the works were large and the subjects were somewhat startling for that time.

RVG: Did that change your feelings about yourself? You go from being this kid wracked with tragedy who enters school not very confident about his artwork, and by the end, you're leader of the pack.

DEB: At that time, I was somewhat driven to succeed somewhere, somehow in the arts. A lot of my classmates didn't continue being artists, but I just wanted to not ever stop being an artist. Some got married and, you know, worked for Sears or something. But I never gave up. I would do *anything* to continue to be an artist! And it appears I somewhat succeeded!

RVG: Were many students doing commercial art on the side? Was there a separation between people who did commercial art and fine artists?

DEB: There was the painting department and there was the design/graphics department and "never the twain shall meet." I didn't know any of the commercial art people until after I graduated. I've become friends with some of them, but at that time I wanted to be a wild, crazy, motherfucking painter like Francis Bacon.

RVG: You graduated Carnegie undergrad in '66?

DEB: Yes, but not before a *lot* of drama … again! Let me explain. It's a tradition at beaux arts schools to have a masquerade ball at the end of a school term. In the late nineteenth century, as an art student, you had to learn to create all these special techniques that allowed you to be called a "royal artist" by the Art Academies in France or England and have the official RA initials after your name.

RVG: Like royally sanctioned?

DEB: Yes, right. You had to go through this whole menu of study. You would mix your own oil paints with linseed oil; you learned how to put the paint in tubes and roll the bottom up. And then you would have your cadmium yellow, or whatever you wanted. Then you had to do a fresco, so you're painting into wet plaster like Michelangelo did in the Sistine Chapel. At Carnegie Tech, we had to do a fresco, and you can only paint it while the plaster is wet. If you have to stop, you have to end there and start your plaster again the next day. It has to be wet. Michelangelo would do his drawing into the wet plaster with the pointed end of a wooden brush. You had to learn to do egg-oil emulsion, and students then had to go to Italy and stay for a year or more. It was a very complex situation. And since you had to go through shit with other students, they all knew each other and became friends, and they influenced each other in trading secrets. At Carnegie, we decided to have a Beaux Arts Ball, which would have a theme and a band called the Hot Nuts. We named it the Super Ball. The band wore transparent raincoats with nothing on underneath! The fine arts building was flagged with all these decorations, and everyone came in costumes. So, you had to choose your costume. But I was in the slammer, so I wasn't part of it.

RVG: Wait … slammer? What happened to you?

DEB: I just didn't want to go on with life. Why? I had anorexia nervosa, so I couldn't get any food down. I would throw up anything I ate. I was living on water and Wonder Bread, which I would roll into balls and eat. That was my meal. Friends worried about me, as I was losing weight. I was ultimately committed to Western State Psychiatric by the school therapist. Ironically, it's right across from the Cathedral of Learning. I was very depressed, so the doctors put me on Thorazine.

RVG: They formally committed you, or did you go in there by yourself?

DEB: With the Tech psychiatrist's help, I put myself in the place. I couldn't stop weeping and crying. The Thorazine put an end to the anxiety and the nausea. Thorazine is for schizophrenia, but they also use it for nausea, anorexia, and severe anxiety.

RVG: So, you missed the ball altogether?

DEB: Yes. It all stemmed from a previous bout of hepatitis when I was in the regular hospital for two weeks. The hepatitis meant I couldn't drink for a year, so I became really despondent about not having my medicine, which was alcohol. I was able to keep off the bottle, but I completely fell apart.

RVG: Were you drinking a lot before then?

DEB: I drank every day, and since I had an alcoholic boyfriend, I drank with him.

RVG: How did you feel about missing this big senior student extravaganza?

DEB: I mean, I wasn't happy, but I wasn't throwing up anymore. Then I had my graduation in '66. I remember we were out on the lawn in front of the fine arts building, and the honorary speakers were Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. He was the dictator of the Philippines. At my graduation, can you believe it? Well, he wasn't persona non grata yet. I thought, *why is this guy here*? This guy is not gonna be good for the Philippines. And he wasn't. And she had all those shoes … thousands, as I recall. [*laughs*]

RVG: So, you did make it back in time for graduation?

DEB: Yeah, I was back in time for graduation, and I was drinking again, so I always had a hangover. At the time, I didn't realize you could get rid of a hangover with "hair of the dog." You just drink more alcohol, and your hangover is gone. My boyfriend got tired of me being such a drag. Also, I had hemorrhoid surgery around this time, and this just sent me over the edge. He left me for a marine. Oh god, he left me for this nineteen-year-old cute jarhead. But I knew I did not want to be in a psycho ward, so I had better pretend I am well and get outta there! I became pretty despondent about the shitstorm that my life had become. I wept often. But I finally did graduate.

RVG: Damn, what a roller coaster. And then what?

DEB: I started working in Pittsburgh. I did a freelance gig at KDKA. The job was to do a bunch of movie graphics for the afternoon movie show, which was hosted by some brunette bombshell. Then I got a really strange job at WQED, the PBS TV station in Pittsburgh, in the art department. We were preparing for this show called *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

RVG: Like, *Mister Rogers* Mr. Rogers? What did you do for that?

DEB: Well, I did a lot of stuff with the set. I remember I bought the couch and the rug and things like that. We had a really low budget, something like two hundred dollars. I went to a lot of thrift stores, and we created the whole *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* house. We also worked with his wife to make the little trolley car.

RVG: What was Fred Rogers like?

DEB: Oh, a very sweet man, and he had a very lovely wife.

RVG: Did it seem like a big deal, or were you looking to get back to school?

DEB: None of us in the WQED art department had any idea what *Mister Rogers* was going to be. I just thought it was this kid's show. I was hoping to get back to painting, though I did a lot of art in the art department there for the many educational shows. We did credit scrolls where we had to hot press the names of actors or presenters on pieces of black paper on a roll. Then a studio assistant put that in front of the camera and turned a crank to roll the credits. You burned your fingers a lot from the hot press, as you had to put metal type in the press and put new type in when the name changed. I mean, it was really like the primitive days of television.

RVG: Did you miss the show when you left WQED?

DEB: Oh no, I couldn't wait to get back to painting. WQED was just a strange blip in my art life, which was interesting but not essential. It all happened so fast. I remember the art director was named Joanie, and she adored martinis. And we had a German camera woman who had a tattoo on her wrist from the Nazis. There was this very sweet guy who worked with me on a mathematics program making algebra formulas on yellow cards with Velcro on the back, which was very boring to do. His name was Bobby, and he eventually worked on costumes for *The Wiz*. But then Carnegie asked me to come back to get a master's degree, which I immediately did. Luckily for me, they included a stipend, so I could afford to do it!

RVG: Was the graduate experience much different than undergraduate?

DEB: Similar. The master's program at Tech was a continuation of my undergraduate experience. I was very familiar with my group of mentors, so I was jazzed and ready to fly! My landlord—who bought my first painting, *The Silent Scream 1962*—gave me a loft in an abandoned building he owned near my apartment. In return, I would do paintings for him of places in Bavaria, where he was stationed during World War II. These were done from black-and-white photos taken around 1945, and I cranked them out in a quick-and-dirty boardwalk style. At the time I did these paintings, I thought I was stretching my technique, so no apologies now! It was a big loft, with no bathroom, no water, no heat, but I did these huge paintings—eight and ten feet high or wide. I was just busy, busy, busy creating a suite of lithographs along with my large paintings, and hiring models for figure drawings—male, of course. I surprised myself at the breadth of my academic skills, which were not yet out of style in the zeitgeist. Thank the mighty Zeus for the pop and op art to come! Then I met my college boyfriend. I officially came out to myself, as it were. This guy just completely possessed me mentally and physically every day and every night.

RVG: Did it surprise you?

DEB: I was surprised. The relationship was so completely sexual. It was like I had discovered what sex was all about—an all-consuming, uncontrollable thing! I knew at that time he was a secret lover of death, as was I. After the bloody alcoholic fights, I knew I was on a ride that thrilled me to death!

RVG: You had girlfriends in the past, right?

DEB: I had been with girls, and I thought that was fine. But it was not exciting and all-consuming like my experience with men. I had an intense sexual affair with a girl at the museum school, where I was a second semester student. We were very, very compatible in every way, and her mother adored me—gay cliché #1. This very sweet girl named Anne just adored me; and I felt she would have wanted to marry me, but I immediately ran away. I ran away from women! I knew then that I would never have sex with a woman again—there was no electricity, no magic, no mystery.

RVG: In the mid-sixties, was being gay super hush-hush?

DEB: Everyone knew. In art school, everyone knew everything. [*laughs*] It's a close-knit group. Somewhat like a small town; people will talk, as they say.

RVG: Were you with this gentleman when you left Pittsburgh?

DEB: No. We were just together for a couple years in art school. He was an architecture student. He also introduced me to binge-drinking, from which there was seemingly no return for me. I needed to drink every day and, eventually, around-the-clock.

RVG: Do you keep in touch with him?

DEB: He passed, but I did, yes. I actually visited him in Denver in about 1968, and he showed me some of the houses he had designed.

RVG: When you realized your own sexual orientation, did it affect your art at all?

DEB: Oh yeah, a lot of my paintings from that time are rather homoerotic —much like Bacon. But at the same time, I was overly conscious to not create what I felt was "gay art," a line I had to cross when I became art director of the *Gay Advocate* fifteen years later. I also did this pope series, because I was really fixated on Pope Pius XII, who I thought was an evil man that represented authoritarianism and fascism in the world. In my naiveté, I thought I might change the world through art.

RVG: How did that come on your radar?

DEB: Just from being in the world. I was not Catholic, but I knew what Pius was accused of doing. I was a big fan of Nietzsche's work, and that led me down several paths such as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and the concept of existentialism. I've always been fascinated by Nazi history, and I've read a lot about it, especially William Shirer's extraordinary *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, in which the author chronicles Nazi Germany from the birth of Adolf Hitler in 1889 to the end of World War II in Europe in 1945. The parts examining Adolf Hitler's personality are hair-raising, to say the very least.

RVG: When you say fascination, was it with the concept of evil?

DEB: Yeah, the concept of evil—Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil." Pius XII was accused of being connected to the infamous "rat line," which sympathetic Catholic clergy and others used to send highly placed Nazi survivors to safety in Argentina and Brazil. The escapees included Adolf Eichmann, who they finally caught and brought to Israel for trial and execution. Whether I consider that "justice was done" is another matter completely—a vengeful death to a hated citizen is no solution at all in my estimation.

RVG: So, you started to incorporate this into your artwork?

DEB: I did, I felt that an artist should speak out about injustice.

RVG: But soon after this, you ventured into more commercial art forms, right?

DEB: Ironically, soon after I graduated, I started to create posters for the Fillmore East, and I started to get flak from people I went to art school with for getting into posters rather than figurative painting. They considered it a commercial sellout. On the other hand, I went to Push Pin Studios to show my portfolio to founder Milton Glaser. I brought two Fillmore East posters along with the usual figure drawings, etc. When looking at the rock posters, he advised I not go in this direction. I have never forgotten that. Why did he say this? Why did I not ask him why he said that? Glaser's comment may seem silly to others, but it made me doubt my talent a great deal, because Glaser and the Push Pin style was already a design icon.

RVG: Today, that concept of selling out doesn't exist anymore?

DEB: Yes, yes, and yes! It was stupid and silly, and it's finally *dead*. Do not rest in peace, please!

RVG: What were your thoughts about it at the time? The idea that, if you did commercial artwork or made money with your artwork, you were a "sellout"?

DEB: This is part of the Warhol Revolution, which for me began in 1950. The art world was asking this stunning question of what exactly is "fine art"? This concept of the "Royal Artist" is obviously very dead and the sellers and purveyors of high art and design needed a new organizing standard in which art is placed in the rather byzantine art marketplace. These days, if it's bad art, it may not be at all without a marketplace and/or critical champion. I felt I was being punished by my critics for just being open to everything—like getting paid for creating art. I was living in New York City, not a cheap affair! But it's much more complicated than that. I'm still trying to figure out this tormented affair between art and mammon, and as an octogenarian, I now know there will be no reckoning, nor should there be! I give up already! I am not an art whore; I am a "commercial artist"—or we can use the lovelier euphemism, "graphic designer"—and happy to be one, thank you very much!

RVG: Right on. So, what happened after graduate school?

DEB: After I had completed my master's program at Carnegie Tech, I continued working in my studio in Pittsburgh for a while. But after reading *Ariel* by Sylvia Plath over and over again whilst weeping into my Merlot, I decided to get outta Dodge and go to stay with my art school pal, Candace Tepfer, in Boston. Candace and I were very close friends from art school, and we had kept in epistolary touch. I left all my paintings and art behind in my Pittsburgh studio and headed for Boston to stay with her. Candace had three cats, and I was deathly allergic to cats. But you know what, after a time with so many cats, my allergies just went away! Next, I found my own apartment on Charter Street in the North End, which I painted yellow, acid yellow-green and white. The bedroom was pie-shaped and came to a point —which was like sleeping in a slice of lemon meringue pie. I was working at an Armenian laundry, washing and drying underwear—and I got a free lunch at the Armenian diner next door. The chemicals used to wash the underwear turned my hands red, and what else it did to me only the mighty Zeus knows.

RVG: But you didn't stay in Boston long.

DEB: No. I became very excited about stone lithography. I was gonna go on to be a student at June Wayne's lithographic workshop in Albuquerque, and I got a recommendation from the dean at Carnegie Tech. But I got interrupted by my old roommate, Peter Nevard, which changed my life forever. He was starting a light show commune, and he wanted me to be the art director. I would create hand-made art slides. I created colors for liquid-projections and other machines like carousel projectors, color wheels, bubble machines, lasers, and strobe lights. We made little inventions that we used in the light shows, like the "black ball" for when we played the Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black." There also were many gadgets that we put together on the farm before we would do a show. We did really great shows due to Peter's show business talent and expertise. I mean, everybody loved it. We ran this disco in Southampton for two summers. The commune would go out in the early spring, and we took this old sail loft building and turned it into a disco. It became really popular with the Warhol crowd and many fashion designers. We had an illuminated dance floor, and I was hanging over on a big suspended platform. I would operate all these machines with my compatriot, Billy Painter. Even Edie Sedgewick showed up, and she tried to cop out on her bill! I chased her, and I almost caught her as she jumped out the bathroom window—very Paul McCartney—and I only got one of her shoes, which I treasured until someone stole it.

RVG: What was the commune called, and where was it?

DEB: It was called Fantasy Unlimited, and it was in Port Jervis, New York. Port Jervis is a town that has a rock in it, and when you stand on the rock, you're in three states: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The townspeople hated us because we were long-haired hippies who had money earned from our shows. They would come out to our farmhouse and try to throw rocks through the windows. But finally, they got used to us, because we spent a lot of money in their little town—especially the pet store, where Peter spent gobs of loot on expensive tropical fish.

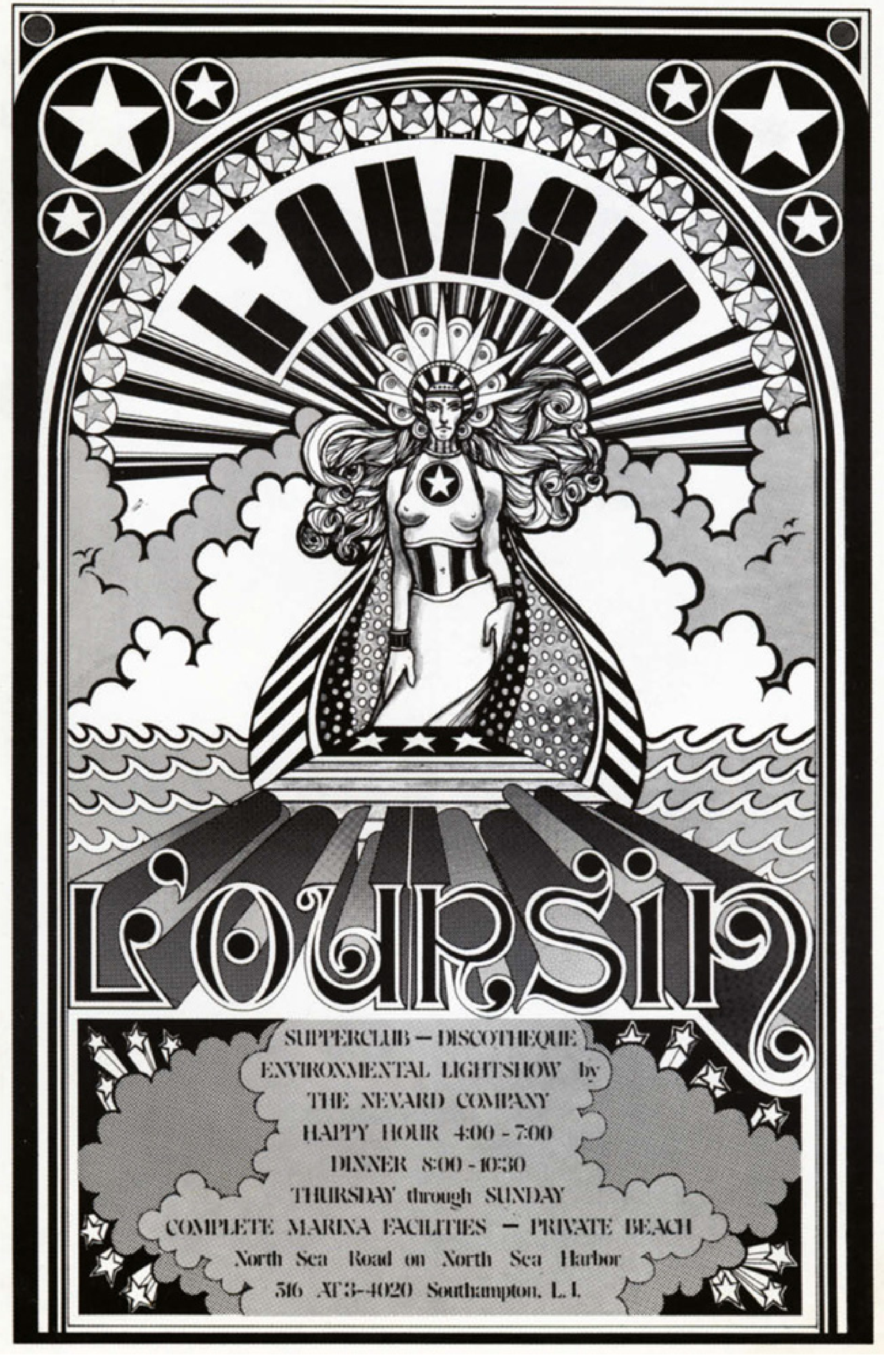
RVG: So, for the later generations who have no concept of what a commune is, what was the ethos, the charter? You said, we're gonna get together and do … what?

DEB: There are lots of legends about sixties communes, but I think ours was unique. We got together specifically to do commercial light shows and make money. Thanks to Peter's connections, we did a lot of them, like the Yardley cosmetics "London Look" press show with supermodel Jean Shrimpton, and Clairol's "Innocence of Blonde" presser with supermodel Cheryl Tiegs. We did shows for Boussac of France fabrics, Tenneco Chemicals in Houston, and more. We had dancers, bubble machines, lasers, and strobes. It was a light show, but it was for commercial products. Bill Blass did his 1968 fashion line with us. We would get paid around five thousand dollars, which at that time was a lot of money.

RVG: Light shows were somewhat new at the time, no?

DEB: Yes, they were. We even went back to Carnegie Tech and did a light show there for their Beaux Arts Ball a year later. After that gig, we traveled to Minneapolis where we did a "Fashion Now" show for Dayton's of Minneapolis, the largest department store there. The very copacetic art director of the store took us down to the river where enormous wild marijuana plants grew over six feet high. We took a few samples back with us to the city. The high was pretty good for untended plants. So, we were all over the place doing light shows, because they were wanted everywhere. I got paid a hundred dollars a week. All I had to pay for was beer and my bus into New York if I decided to go by myself. I would take the bus from Monroe to downtown Manhattan.

Byrd is pictured here in 1967 on the Fantasy Unlimited commune farm in Port Jervis, New York. The group was originally formed to create light shows for corporate events but soon branched out to managing a discotheque in the Hamptons. It was at the farm that Byrd got the call to produce his first rock posters for the Fillmore East.



SUPPERCLUB — DISCOTHEQUE
ENVIRONMENTAL LIGHTSHOW by
THE NEVARD COMPANY
HAPPY HOUR 4:00 - 7:00
DINNER 8:00 - 10:30
THURSDAY through SUNDAY
COMPLETE MARINA FACILITIES — PRIVATE BEACH
North Sea Road on North Sea Harbor
516 AT3-4020 Southampton, L. I.

Byrd created this poster for the disco L'Oursin (French for the "sea urchin"), located in Southampton, New York, which he helped run during the summers of 1967 and 1968. This design was the very first poster Byrd ever created, and it foreshadowed the symmetry, perspective, and intricate design that would later become his trademark style.

RVG: Had the light show and the music concert come together yet?

DEB: It was happening. We knew Joshua White from the infamous Joshua Light Show. I had been friends with him at Carnegie Tech. Him and Kip Cohen, the Fillmore East manager, got me into posters. Josh and Kip were both in the drama department at Carnegie. I was still at the commune in Port Jervis when I created my first Fillmore poster for Traffic, Blue Cheer, and Iron Butterfly in April 1968.

RVG: Interesting. A commune specifically formed as a commercial venture to do light shows?

DEB: Right. Peter was interested in making both money and art, and I agreed with him. Let's make money! [*laughs*] That's what runs this country, and you can't sneer at money unless you have a lot of it.

RVG: I would imagine doing this work was not popular amongst your peers? We've talked about this, but let's get more specific.

DEB: No, it wasn't. No one talked about money much.

RVG: Did it create arguments?

DEB: Yeah, it was like "The Man." The Man meant money. To be The Man, you had to have money, right? Or power. Or both. I was and still am a rather passive person who has never cared for competition, especially in art.

RVG: Did your friends call you and say, "Hey, you've sold out."

DEB: Not me directly, but we were called "rich hippies." [*laughs*] But we weren't rich. I don't know, we were getting along very well in the new world of light shows. We made a good living. And we grew vegetables and marijuana, and we drank beer and smoked pot and, you know, worked on the next show. We were just happy communards, so to speak.

RVG: Did your place include the sexual aspects of hippie communes?

DEB: Oh yes. Everyone was mated except me. I was the lone wolf. They all had girlfriends and boyfriends, but I just had my dogs, Mrs. Moon and Ophelia, which was plenty enough for me.

RVG: When did the commune end?

DEB: In 1969. I moved with the commune to a loft in New York City on West Seventeenth Street right off Fifth Avenue. At that time, it was a manufacturing area, not the chic Chelsea that it is now. No one called it Chelsea except for me; I liked it. "Chelsea Morning." We were on the edge of my beloved Greenwich Village.

RVG: What was Chelsea like at the time?

DEB: It was very industrial. I remember on the first floor of our building that there was a chicken joint that made deep-fried bird for workers. [*laughs*] And we were on the sixth floor, and you had to put a key in the elevator to go up. And it was five thousand square feet, around which we rode our bikes.

RVG: And what was the rent?

DEB: Six hundred dollars a month.

RVG: Score! How many of you lived there?

DEB: It was just Peter, Nina, and me. Then I left, and Nina and Peter got their own loft on Sixteenth Street.

RVG: And you were doing light shows all the way up to '69?

DEB: Yes, and in '68 I created that first poster for the Fillmore East for the Traffic/Blue Cheer/Iron Butterfly show. Next came Jefferson Airplane, and after that, Jimi Hendrix.

RVG: Were you doing any fine art at that time?

DEB: No, I didn't have any time! You know, if you draw all day for someone else then you don't want to draw for yourself at night. [*laughs*] It just doesn't work out.

RVG: Were you content with life?

DEB: When I was in the commune, I was just tickled pink. But it was there that I realized that people have a hard time getting along with one another. But I was really happy because I was not ambitious. I am not a competitive person at heart. I just wanted to make art. It seemed I was just really happy and everybody else had problems. There was a *lot* of drama, but my turmoil was totally internal.

RVG: How did the vibe change when you moved from the country to the city?

DEB: After a while at the farm, we realized we wanted to be back in the city. Eventually it was just Peter and Nina and me. They started to not get along and eventually divorced. She lives here in Los Angeles. I see her and her second husband, David Berson, now and again. Peter Nevard died from heart failure in 2000. I am in touch with his daughter, Lindsay, from his second wife, Madeleine.

RVG: So, where did you move when you got out of the building on Seventeenth?

DEB: Oh, I got a little one-room apartment on West Seventieth near Riverside Drive.

RVG: And how much was that apartment?

DEB: Oh, I think it was $150 a month.

RVG: And what was that neighborhood like? Was there much up there?

DEB: It was the glorious Upper West Side! There was Zabar’s deli, which was more than great. Also, it’s near Lincoln Center, for which I started creating posters for the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center, like *The Good Woman of Setzuan* by Bertolt Brecht. Then eventually I began to do other types of graphics, such as editorial illustration, book covers, logos, and such.

NEW YORK

1969–1979

Byrd arrives in New York City in the late ’60s and is immersed in the city’s creative opportunities and debaucherous lifestyle. Thanks to important commissions from rock promoters and Broadway producers, he is introduced to an art form that will be his trademark: the poster. The opportunities are endless, but so are the temptations.

Robert von Goeben: Tell me about working in New York City.

David Edward Byrd: In 1969, I moved to my own apartment on West Seventieth Street, from which I continued to pursue work at art agencies, art studios, record companies, etc. People said I had gone commercial —“Here’s once again another creative person who has gone down the toilet!” But I was going around, and I finally got an appointment with Milton Glaser, the legendary graphic designer. I showed him my portfolio, which had the usual drawings from art school, plus my Jimi Hendrix and Rolling Stones posters. And he said to me, “Well, don’t keep doing this. This is not good.” As I mentioned previously, I thought to myself, *Why did he say this*?

RVG: What did he want you to do?

DEB: All I can think of is he was suggesting that I focus on the fine art drawing.

RVG: Why would he say that?

DEB: That's what I don't understand, to this very day.

RVG: But he made his living doing commercial art.

DEB: I know! At the time, my artist friend Matt told me, "I think he was jealous—or he was threatened." And I said, "Jealous? I don't get it!" I was such a nudnik.

RVG: Was he not impressed with the work?

DEB: I got the feeling that I was just another art wannabe passing through his world on the way to the gas company. The interview certainly didn't change anything about my life, but I always had this terrible feeling in the back of my head that I was a fraud.

RVG: Because you were in a field that you weren't trained for.

DEB: I think it was more complicated. My self-esteem was in the toilet, and I had this terrible self-image. I was rather handsome, but my demeanor was somewhat "fey." I was always aware of that—I wore my sexuality on my sleeve, so to speak.

RVG: Was there ever any temptation to bail on the commercial art world and go back to fine art?

DEB: Living in Manhattan? I would be rendered penniless in very short order. Also, I had absolutely no incentive for such a reckless move, as I had gotten exceedingly busy. I seemed to be creating posters like they were sausages, especially for Broadway and off-Broadway theater. I didn't get as much rock work at this time because I was in New York, which was not much of a rock town.

RVG: Was your style getting to be "the new thing"?

DEB: Yeah, it was. That's why I was so busy. Also, I was getting paid for doing these hundred-dollar take-it-or-leave-it theatre posters, for productions like *Soon* and *Frank Merriwell or Honor Challenged*. It suddenly dawned on me that I was part of a new style. But there were a bunch of us. I did a lot of work for the Blaine Thompson Agency, which was the big Broadway agency in New York City. They were the Broadway agency for *Follies*. I wasn't part of the *Follies* agreement, but Roger Puckett intervened—the agency had already hired fourteen paid artists to do sketches. They didn't have any sketch-fee money left, so I agreed to do my sketch for free. I did a little sketch, nine by twelve, for nothing. What did I have to lose? Also, not yet being a part of Broadway culture, I did not realize the gravitas of this production company, with such shows as *West Side Story, Company*, and *Cabaret*! I had been creating theater posters for only a year, and I had much catching up to do on theater culture, its people and history. I was not exactly a bumpkin but very much a quick study. And Mary Mother of Zeus, it's the one they chose! I was shocked! Ironically, the design I submitted was nothing like the famous final poster. It was a totally different image.

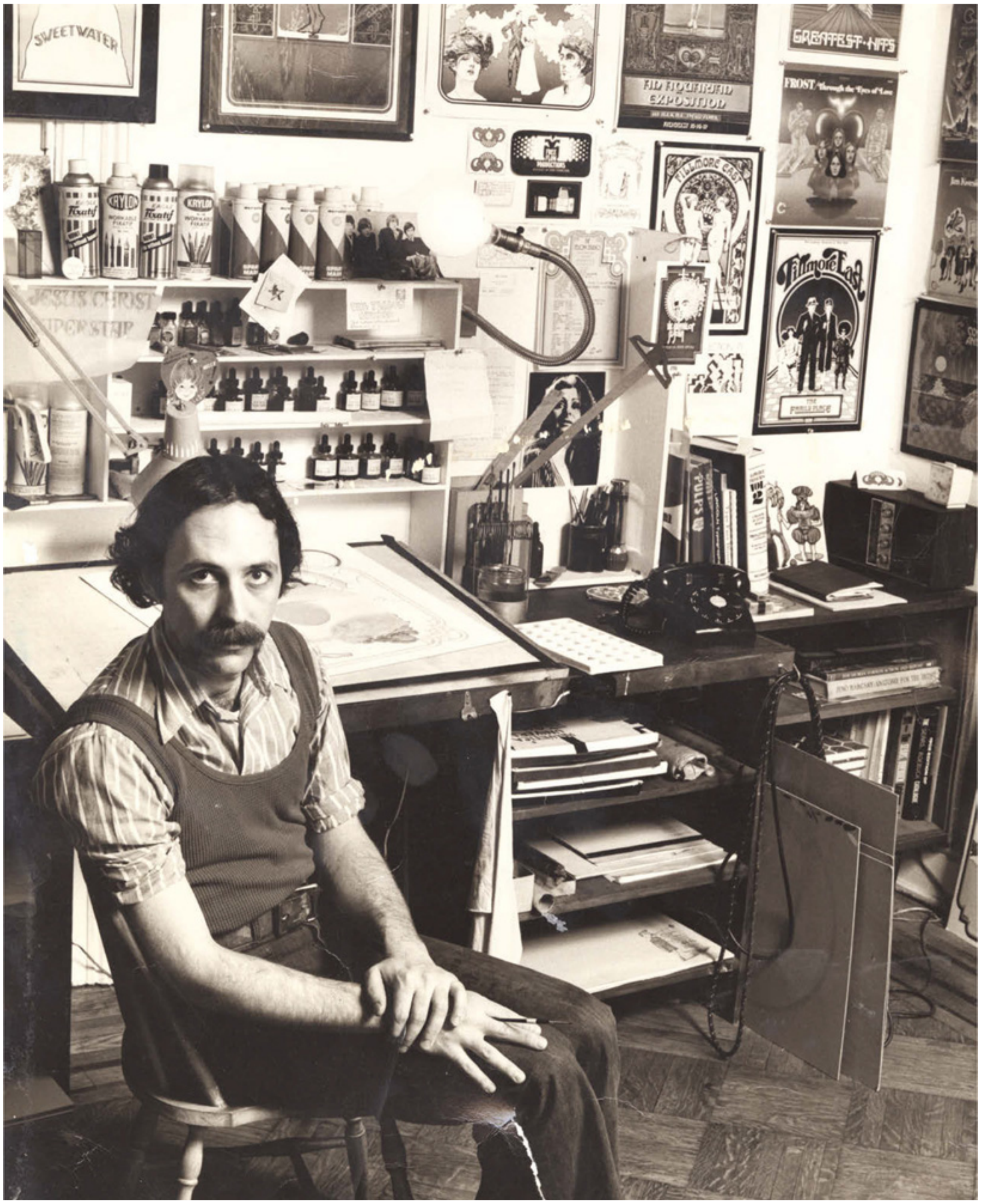
RVG: So, among the artists who submitted concepts, they chose yours?

DEB: Yeah, for no money. All the other artists were getting paid for their comps. I didn't get paid, but I got the job, which is better than getting paid, actually. In fact, a lot of theater people consider my *Follies* poster the greatest theater poster of all time. I love the hyperbole, but it's a bit extreme.

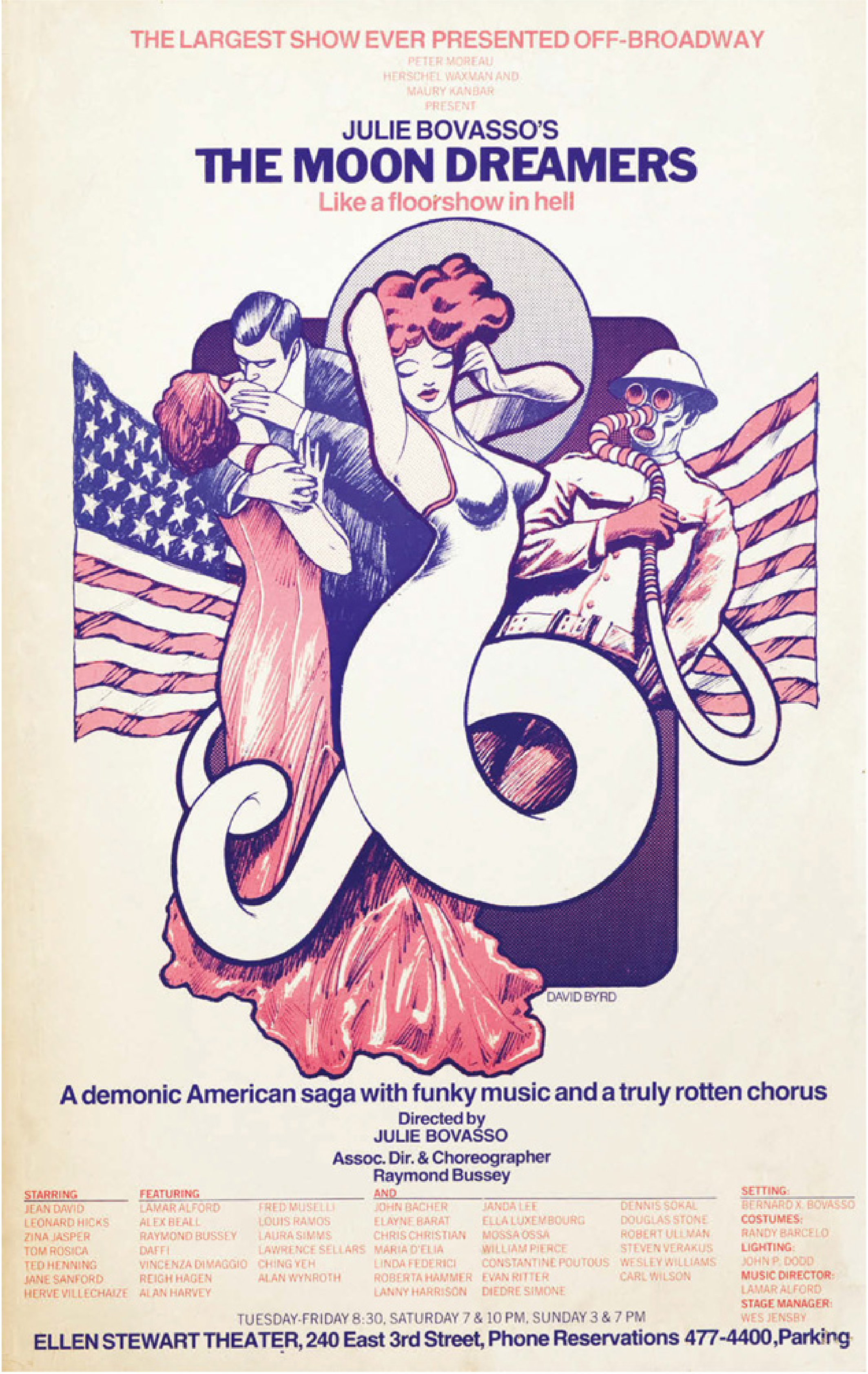
RVG: What Broadway posters do you think are notable?

DEB: *Equus, Lion King, Wicked, Comedians, Hamlet, Big River, Sunday in the Park with George*, and many others. I was just this morning speaking with Frank "Fraver" Verlizzo, who is now the most famous Broadway poster artist in the world. He was my first student at Pratt Institute in 1971, where I taught for eight years. I had just created the *Follies* poster. Immediately after he graduated, he became an artist at the Blaine Thompson Agency. Over the years, he created posters for Steven Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Sweeney Todd*. He became "it"—I call him the "it girl" of the theater-poster world. [*laughs*] In my first class at Pratt, I had two students who have become rather famous. The other student is Tom Nikosey, who lives here in LA. He has become a big musical artist who also created many Super Bowl typographic logos. I encouraged him in my class crits. I said, “You should go into typography. You have a real knack for fonts.” And he became a famous typographer who now has his own typography house called CozyFonts. He has created a ton of logos, as well as posters and illustrations. He’s the logo man of the world.

RVG: What other poster styles really impress you?



Byrd is pictured in his Brooklyn studio in 1970, surrounded by his work for the Fillmore East, the Rolling Stones, Woodstock, and many others. The illustration in progress is the cover of the 1971 album Food for the Mind *by Zager and Evans*.



THE LARGEST SHOW EVER PRESENTED OFF-BROADWAY

PETER MOREAU
HERSCHEL WAXMAN AND
MAURY KANBAR
PRESENT

JULIE BOVASSO'S

THE MOON DREAMERS

Like a floorshow in hell

DAVID BYRD

A demonic American saga with funky music and a truly rotten chorus

Directed by
JULIE BOVASSO

Assoc. Dir. & Choreographer
Raymond Bussey

STARRING
JEAN DAVID
LEONARD HICKS
ZINA JASPER
TOM ROSICA
TED HENNING
JANE SANFORD
HERVE VILLECHAIZE

FEATURING
LAMAR ALFORD
ALEX BEALL
RAYMOND BUSSEY
DAFFI
VINCENZA DIMAGGIO
REIGH HAGEN
ALAN HARVEY
FRED MUSELLI
LOUIS RAMOS
LAURA SIMMS
LAWRENCE SELLARS
CHING YEH
ALAN WYNROTH

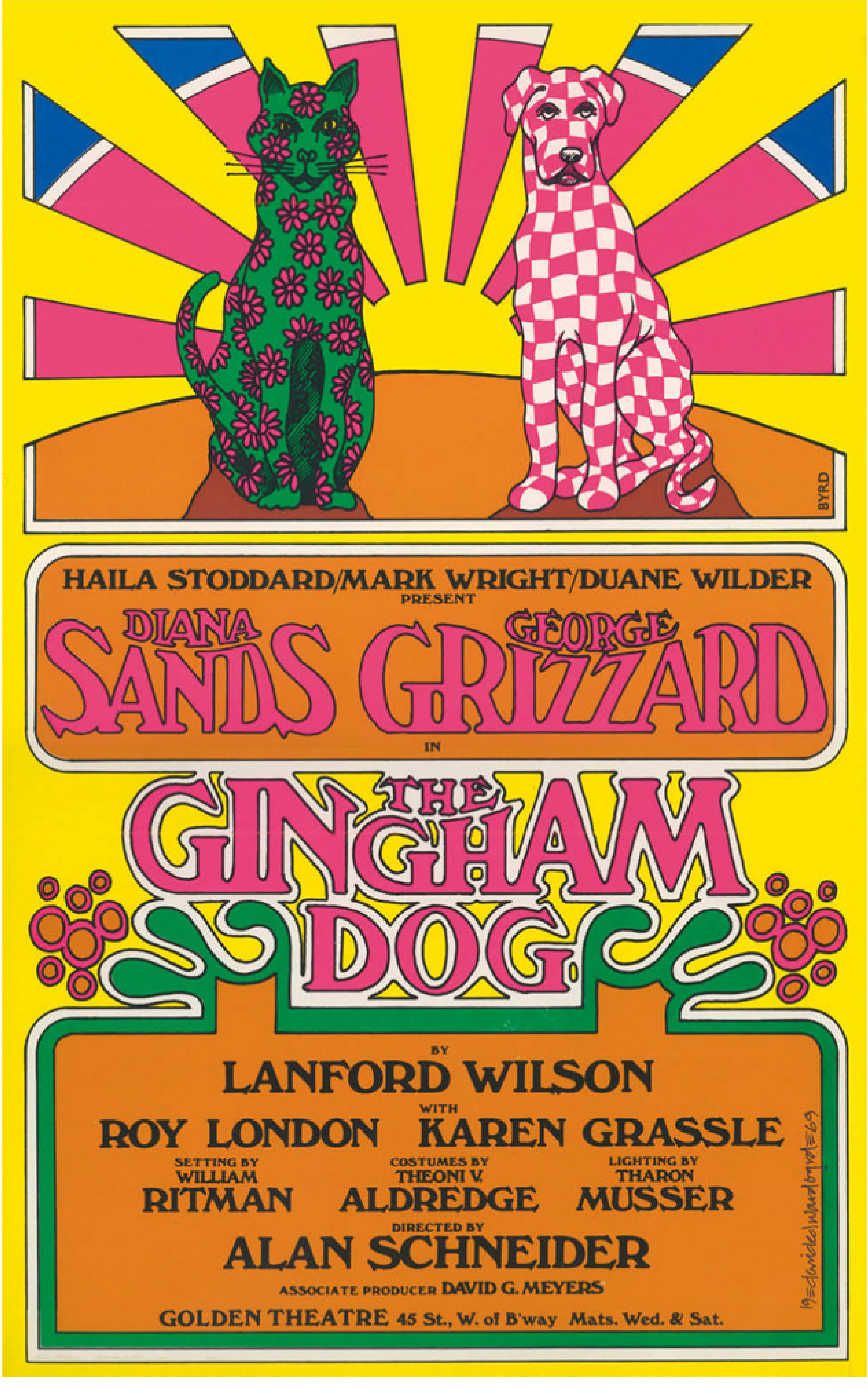
AND
JOHN BACHER
ELAYNE BARAT
CHRIS CHRISTIAN
MARIA D'ELIA
LINDA FEDERICI
ROBERTA HAMMER
LANNY HARRISON
JANDA LEE
ELLA LUXEMBOURG
MOSSA OSSA
WILLIAM PIERCE
CONSTANTINE POUTOUS
EVAN RITTER
DIEDRE SIMONE
DENNIS SOKAL
DOUGLAS STONE
ROBERT ULLMAN
STEVEN VERAKUS
WESLEY WILLIAMS
CARL WILSON

SETTING:
BERNARD X. BOVASSO
COSTUMES:
RANDY BARCELO
LIGHTING:
JOHN P. DODD
MUSIC DIRECTOR:
LAMAR ALFORD
STAGE MANAGER:
WES JENSBY

TUESDAY-FRIDAY 8:30, SATURDAY 7 & 10 PM, SUNDAY 3 & 7 PM

ELLEN STEWART THEATER, 240 East 3rd Street, Phone Reservations 477-4400, Parking

The Moon Dreamers *was Byrd's first theatrical poster, made in 1969. The play was written and directed by Julie Bovasso, later known for her portrayal as John Travolta's mother in the movie* Saturday Night Fever. *The cast of the play included the French actor Hervé Villechaize, who later came to fame on the television show* Fantasy Island. *Byrd describes the play as "an epic with a hard-to-follow story."*



HAILA STODDARD/MARK WRIGHT/DUANE WILDER
PRESENT

DIANA SANDS GEORGE GRIZZARD

IN

THE GINGHAM DOG

BY
LANFORD WILSON

WITH
ROY LONDON KAREN GRASSLE

SETTING BY
WILLIAM RITMAN

COSTUMES BY
THEONI V. ALDREDGE

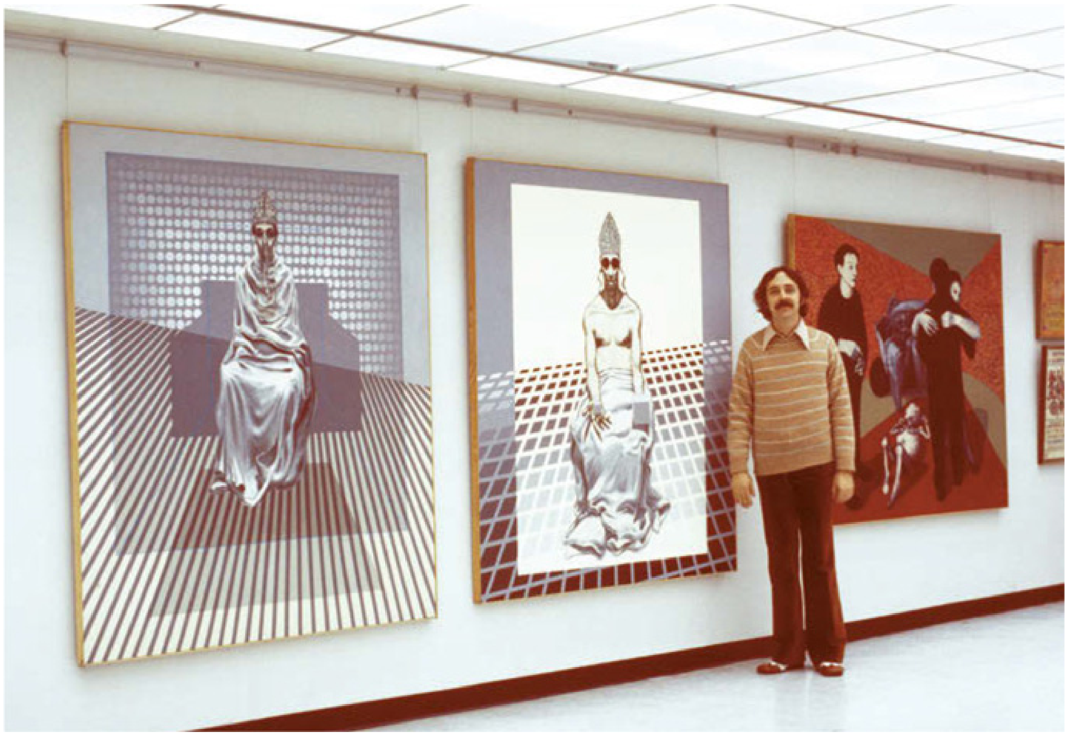
LIGHTING BY
THARON MUSSER

DIRECTED BY
ALAN SCHNEIDER

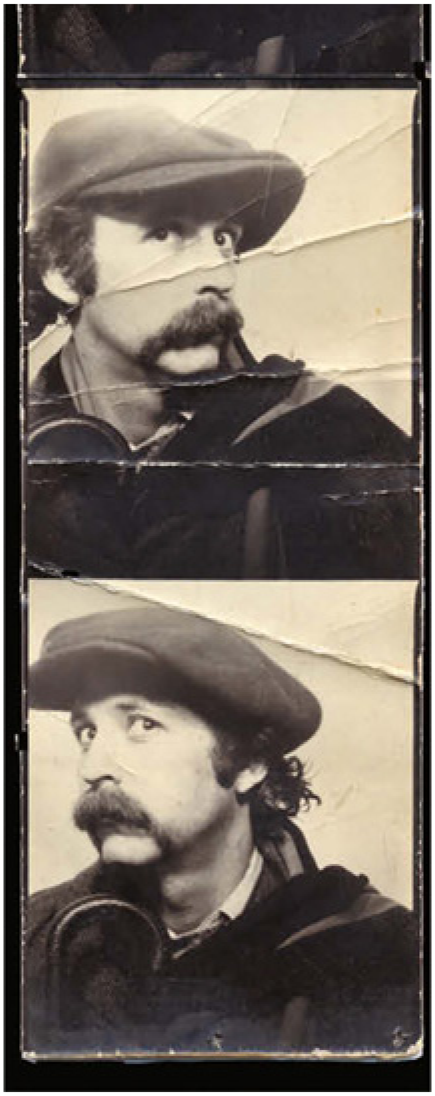
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **DAVID G. MEYERS**

GOLDEN THEATRE 45 St., W. of B'way Mats. Wed. & Sat.

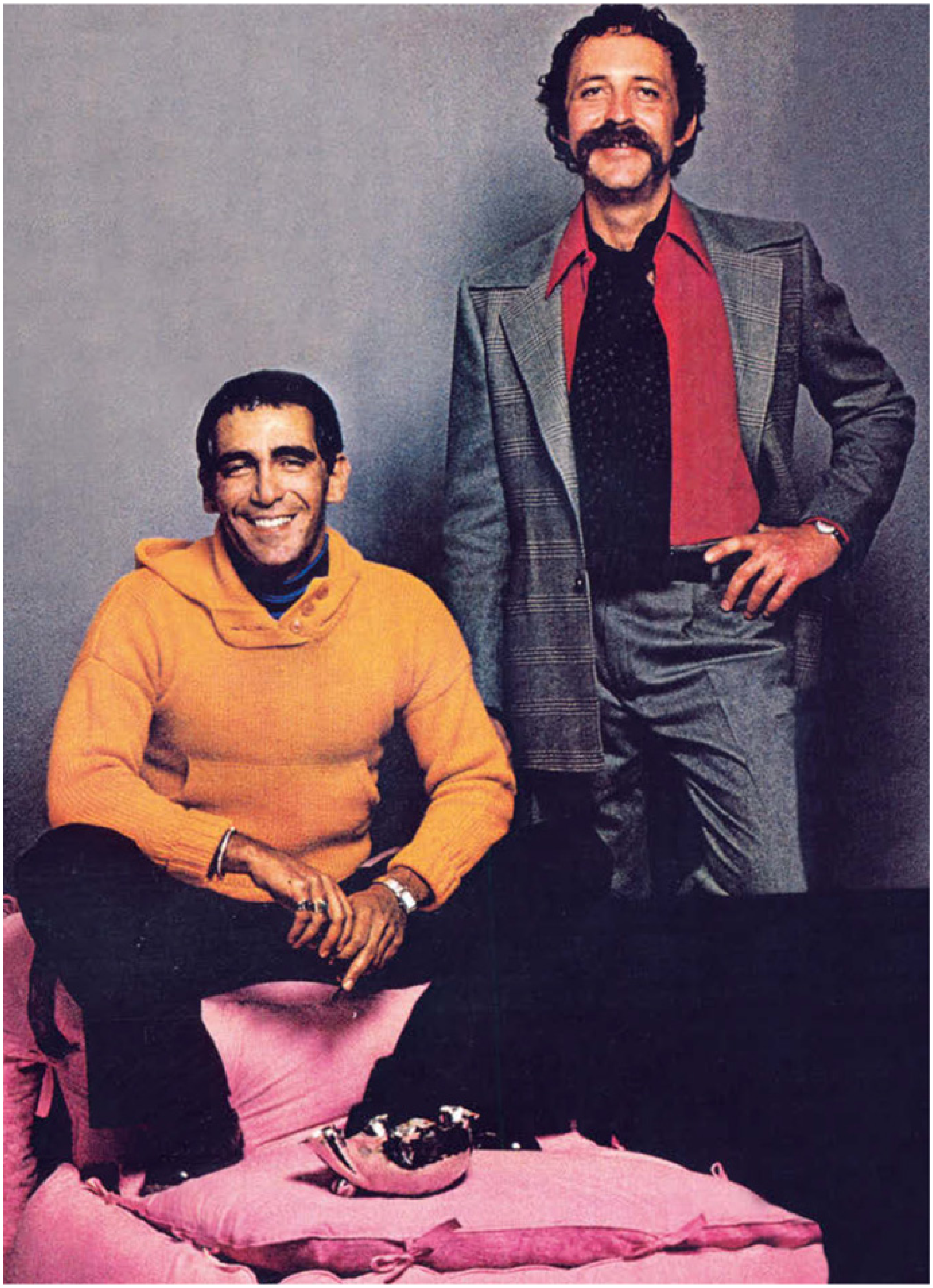
This was Byrd's first Broadway theater poster, made for the 1969 production of The Gingham Dog. *He got the job because they wanted something that looked like a rock poster to draw people in. Byrd would go on to design posters for several Lanford Wilson plays*.



Byrd poses at an exhibit of his work at Brooklyn College in 1969.



This photo-booth strip, taken in 1968, was given to noted artist Tom Nikosey while he was a student of Byrd's at Pratt Institute. It was unearthed in 2022.



Byrd (right) was featured in a 1973 issue of GQ *magazine as part of a fashion shoot that celebrated well-known New York creative professionals. When the shoot was finished, he tried and failed to keep the suit.*

DEB: The A. M. Cassandre poster for *La Route Bleue* is my favorite poster in all the world, and it still is after all this time. I think he's one of the greatest poster artists of all time.

RVG: Is this something you were exposed to in school, or did you discover this on your own?

DEB: This was after I began creating posters. I love how he uses the perspective of the rails, the trees—it's just so simple and perfectly gorgeous. A lot of times he would use type around the border edge.

RVG: Which is very reminiscent of one of your early Fillmore posters.

DEB: My very first poster for Fillmore East was for a Traffic/Blue Cheer/Iron Butterfly concert, where I had the letters around the border creating a one-point perspective to the checkerboard floor. At the time I did that one, I had never seen Cassandre's work before. But when I saw it, I thought, *Oh yeah, somebody else did it, of course—isn't that great!*

RVG: Do you remember where you got exposed to it?

DEB: Well, yes, it was when I had to collect reference images in order to give a talk on the history of the poster at the Ringling Museum in Sarasota. It is part of the John and Mabel Ringling estate. I then had a show there in 2007. It was my first retrospective exhibition.

RVG: After the Fillmore East closed in 1971, did all your poster work just go away?

DEB: Well, no. Actually, Bill [Graham, founder of the Fillmore theaters] called me a few times. I did a poster for the [Grateful] Dead at the Nassau Coliseum in 1973, and I also created a couple of private things for him, like an invitation to an event. After that it was mostly theater work and book covers. I mean, that was really my bread and butter. I did twenty or so book covers, mostly paperbacks. I did fifteen covers for the Lord Peter Wimsey mystery series. I had to read all the Wimsey books, of course. My concept for each cover was that I would never show a person's face unless they were dead.

RVG: You were living at the apartment over on Seventieth Street in New York during this time, right?

DEB: Yes. West End Avenue and Seventieth Street, across from where the rich people lived.

RVG: What was going on in your private life at this point? I mean, were you living by yourself, were you dating anybody, were you partying all the time?

DEB: Well, I certainly did a lot of that, but I also had a boyfriend. I met a guy who was a designer in his last year at Pratt. We spent a rocky twelve years together. He eventually became the art director of *GQ* magazine. But when we met, he was still a student at Pratt. His name was Jon Shaheen. His father and brother were both Lutheran ministers.

RVG: I asked your good friend Dorian Hannaway, who was with the William Morris Agency and later cowrote Debbie Reynold's autobiography, if there was much gay discrimination in 1970s New York. She remembered there wasn't because it was a community of art directors who just wanted good work no matter who it came from. How much were you able to live your life, and how much was clandestine?

DEB: Oh no, it wasn't clandestine at all. I had a lot of gay friends who were designers and photographers. There were a lot of gay people in New York who were professionals. I mean, there was harassment, but it was the price of admission. The bigger issue in 1970s New York was the crime. I had a gun to my head several times. I was on the subway once and this guy came in, and he had a huge black fist around his neck carved out of wood. He sat down next to me, and I was eating a sandwich because I'd come from delivering a job and was starving. He grabbed the sandwich out of my hand and ate it. And then he said, "I'm going home with you!" You know, random craziness sometimes appeared. And then I thought, *Oh my God.*

What do I do when I have to get off? Fortunately, he suddenly ran out the door about two stops before I got off. Another close call.

RVG: Did these kinds of things scare you, or was it part of life in New York City that you got a little accustomed to?

DEB: Oh, it was part of life in New York City. I just accepted it.

RVG: So how long did this period in your life last?

DEB: Well, around that time I got a severe case of hepatitis, and I was jaundiced. So I went over and stayed with my boyfriend, Jon, who had a huge place in Brooklyn near Pratt, where he was an art student. I lived there with him for a time until I recovered from the hepatitis. And then the weirdest thing happened: the landlord of the house in which we had a duplex apartment really liked us. He was a closeted Irishman who had this 1883 unattached Victorian house with three mortgages. He proposed selling me the property for $1,000 as long as I would assume the three extant mortgages. All the brokers were as aghast as I was! So I let him sell me the house for *way* below market value! It was at 364 Washington Avenue in Brooklyn. I thought, *What? I'm gonna own a house? Me?*

RVG: Do you know why he did that?

DEB: He was kind of crazy, and he liked us. He owned a lot of properties in the neighborhood, and this house was really falling down. I can't remember his name now, but he asked me, "Do you want to buy this house?" and I said, "I can't buy this house." You know, it was one of these weird conversations. And he said, "Well, whatever you can pay, we'll do it." At the time it was an apartment house, and it was all Pratt students.

RVG: Did you keep all the people in the apartments, or did you kick them all out and take the whole house?

DEB: Jon and I were already renting the second and third floor duplex, and I rented out the first floor and the back addition, both of which were large. The first floor was lavish, with carved ceilings and sliding doors. All in

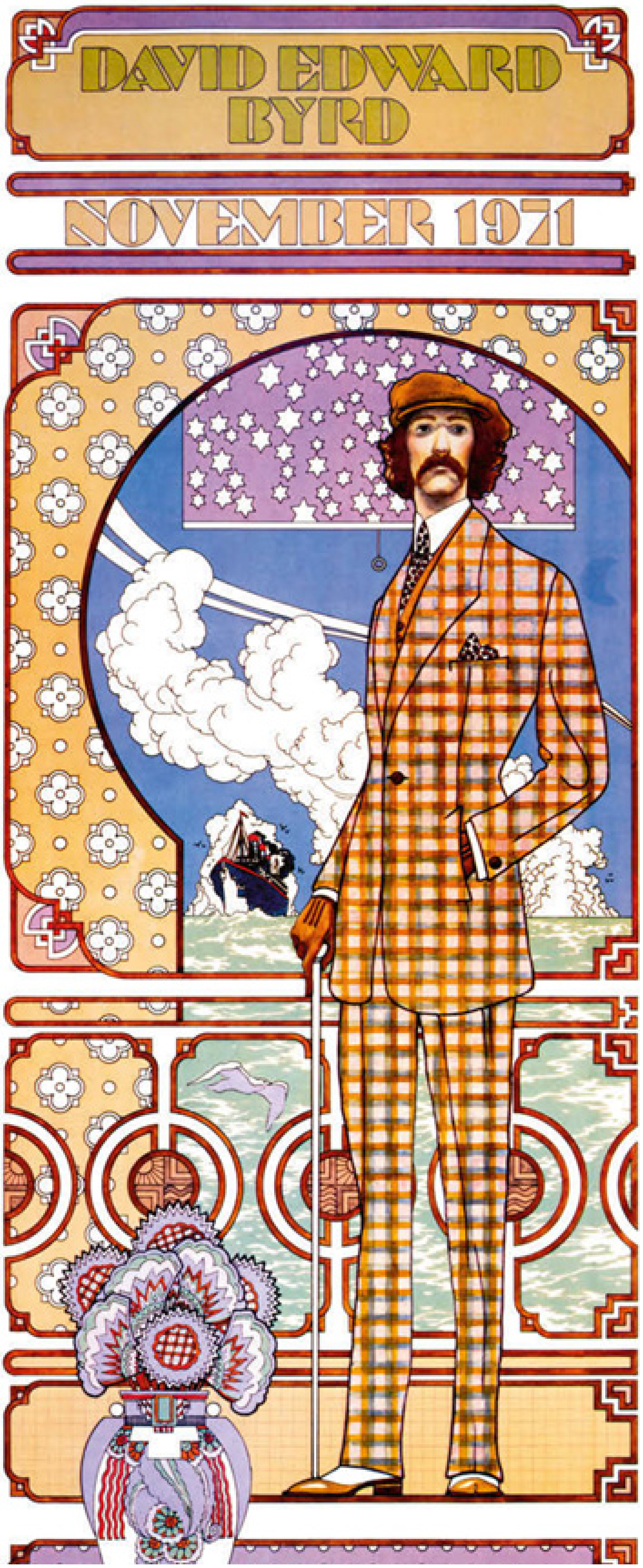
Dorothy Draper white. Beautiful. And it had floor-to-ceiling windows in the front with plantation shutters. I rented that to my cousin Douglas Mount, an editor at Dial/Dellacorte, who lived there with his boyfriend Mark. Douglas was from my mother's side of the family. Like most of the Mounts, including me, he was an alcoholic. He was also gay, of course. We lived there until Douglas and Mark moved to San Francisco when Douglas became editor at Straight Arrow Press, the parent company of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Because I had no money, things got hairy financially with the house. Then I had my only truly cosmic experience. There was a time I needed two thousand dollars in two weeks to cover a balloon payment, or the greedy man who held one of the mortgages was going to foreclose and demolish. All my friends were poor artists, and I had no credit at all. It really got down to the wire, and then it was one week away. I was nervously going through my little Victorian desk, and in a cubby hole I pulled out an envelope that had a muddy shoe print on it. In the envelope was twenty-one hundred dollar bills. The payment was met! Then in 1976, we moved to the loft on Seventeenth in Manhattan. I remember because it was when Jimmy Carter was elected and walked with Rosalynn down Pennsylvania Avenue.

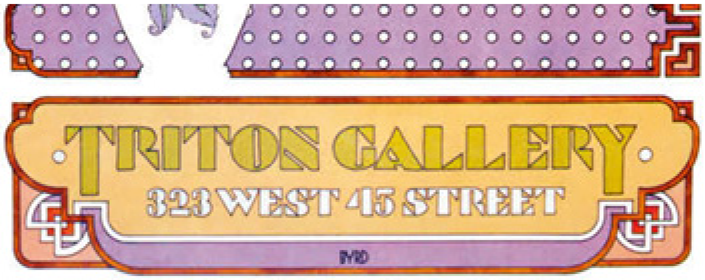
RVG: What was that place like?

DEB: We had the entire sixth floor—five thousand square feet for six hundred dollars a month. It's now selling—in now-fancy Chelsea—for millions!

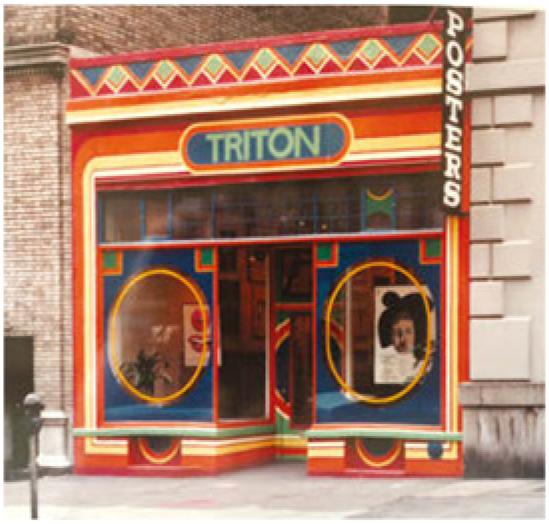
RVG: People who you knew at the time say your studio was all yellow.

DEB: It was named the "Yellow Studio" on an emotional whim. I was a great fan of the [Federico] Fellini film *Juliet of the Spirits*. Juliet was the extraordinary Giulietta Masina, who was Fellini's wife and muse. In the movie, she's a wealthy housewife who is searching. She's unhappy with her husband, who kind of ignores her, and they live in this fancy house with trees that are like little balls on sticks. Everything is so managed and controlled. She goes around searching, and at one point in the film, she goes into a bedroom, and it's all yellow, and there's this gorgeous dark-haired man in a white yoga outfit. The room is all draped in white gauze; it's very spiritual-looking but very sexual. So I thought to myself, *Well, my studio just has to be yellow*. And it was that way forever. But I very rarely use pure yellow in my work except in small doses. It’s just the highest chroma that blasts out at you the way white and vermillion do. It just zaps your retina with this powerful hue. For me, yellow is the most powerful color on the color wheel. Many people say red, but I always say yellow. It’s hard to use yellow in a painting unless you really know what you’re doing, like van Gogh.

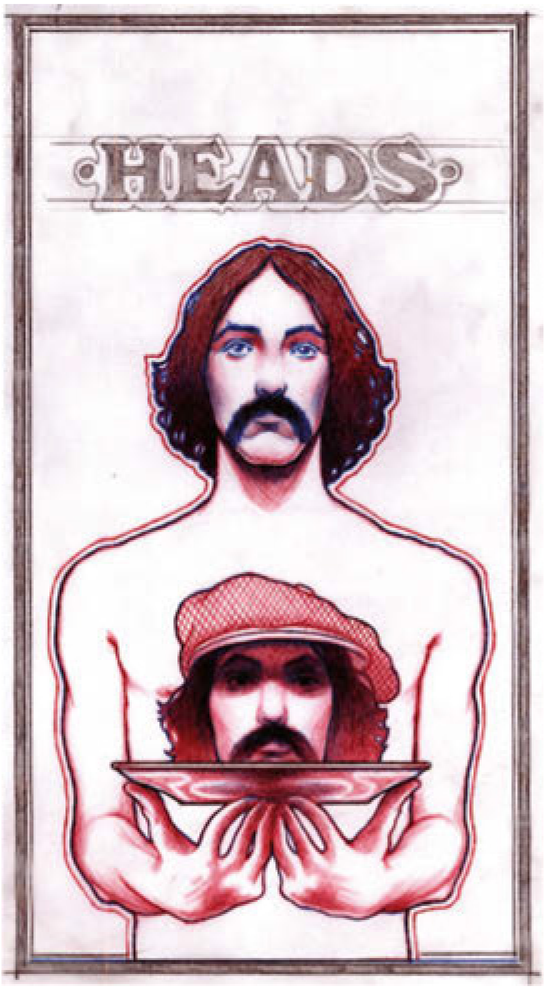

DAVID EDWARD BYRD
NOVEMBER 1971



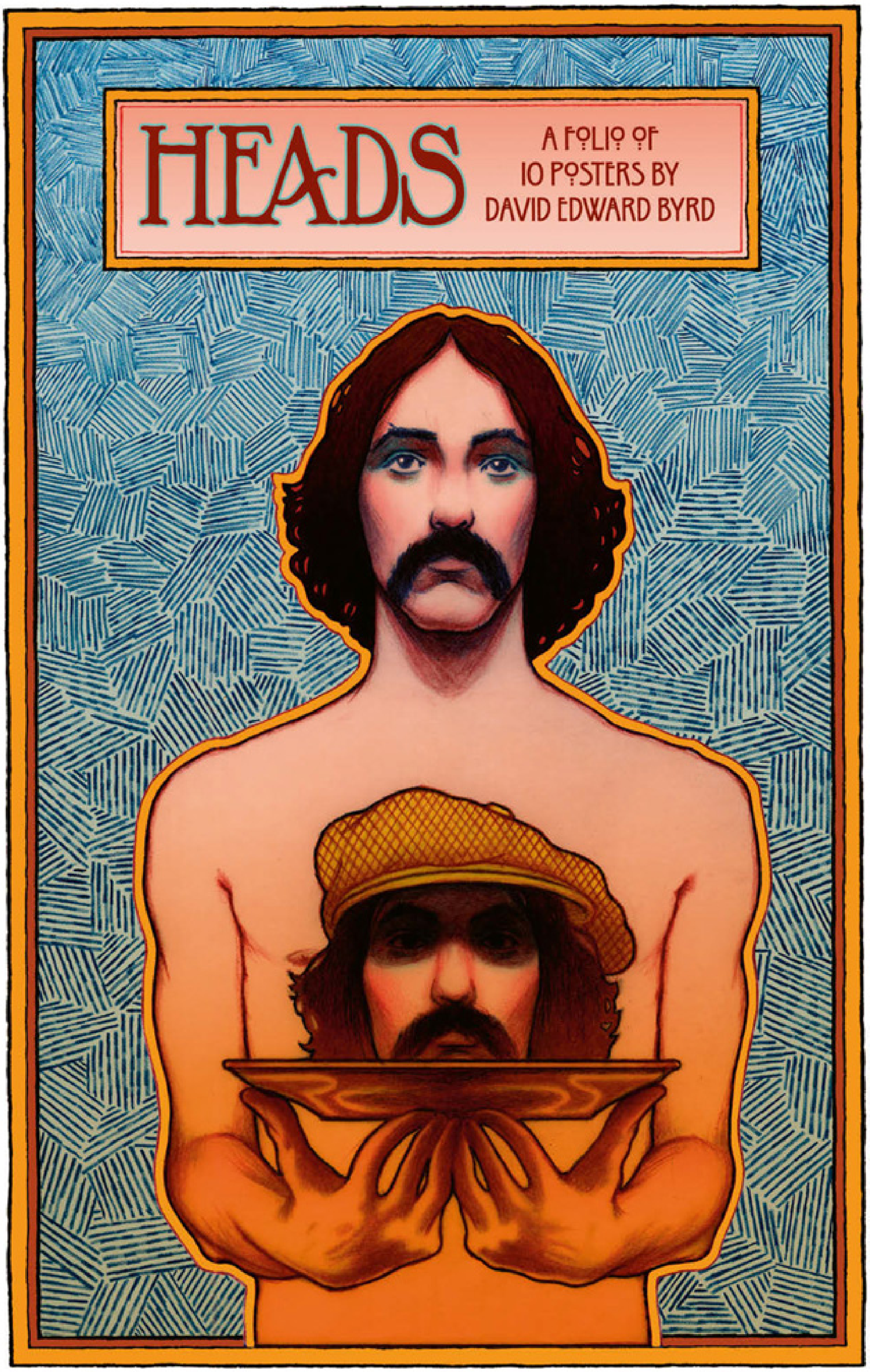
Byrd created this poster for a 1971 exhibition of his work at Triton Gallery in New York. The show featured visual installations by the pornographer Wakefield Poole, and the opening was attended by Alexis Smith, Dorothy Collins, John McMartin, and Bette Midler. Byrd had the suit custom made specifically for this poster, and he wore it to the opening. Curiously, this art has become a popular needlepoint pattern.


POSTERS
TRITON

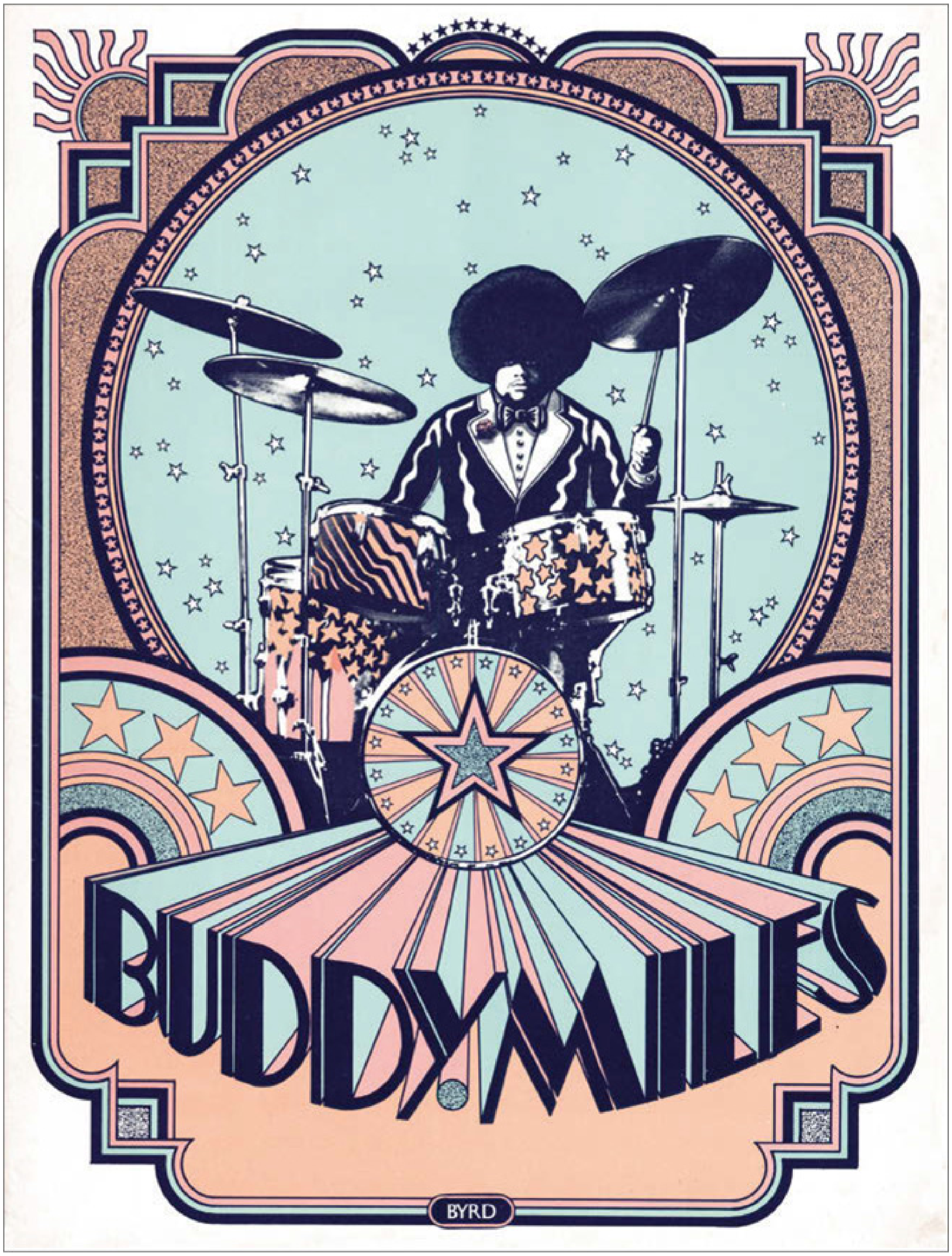
Triton Gallery, New York City, 1971



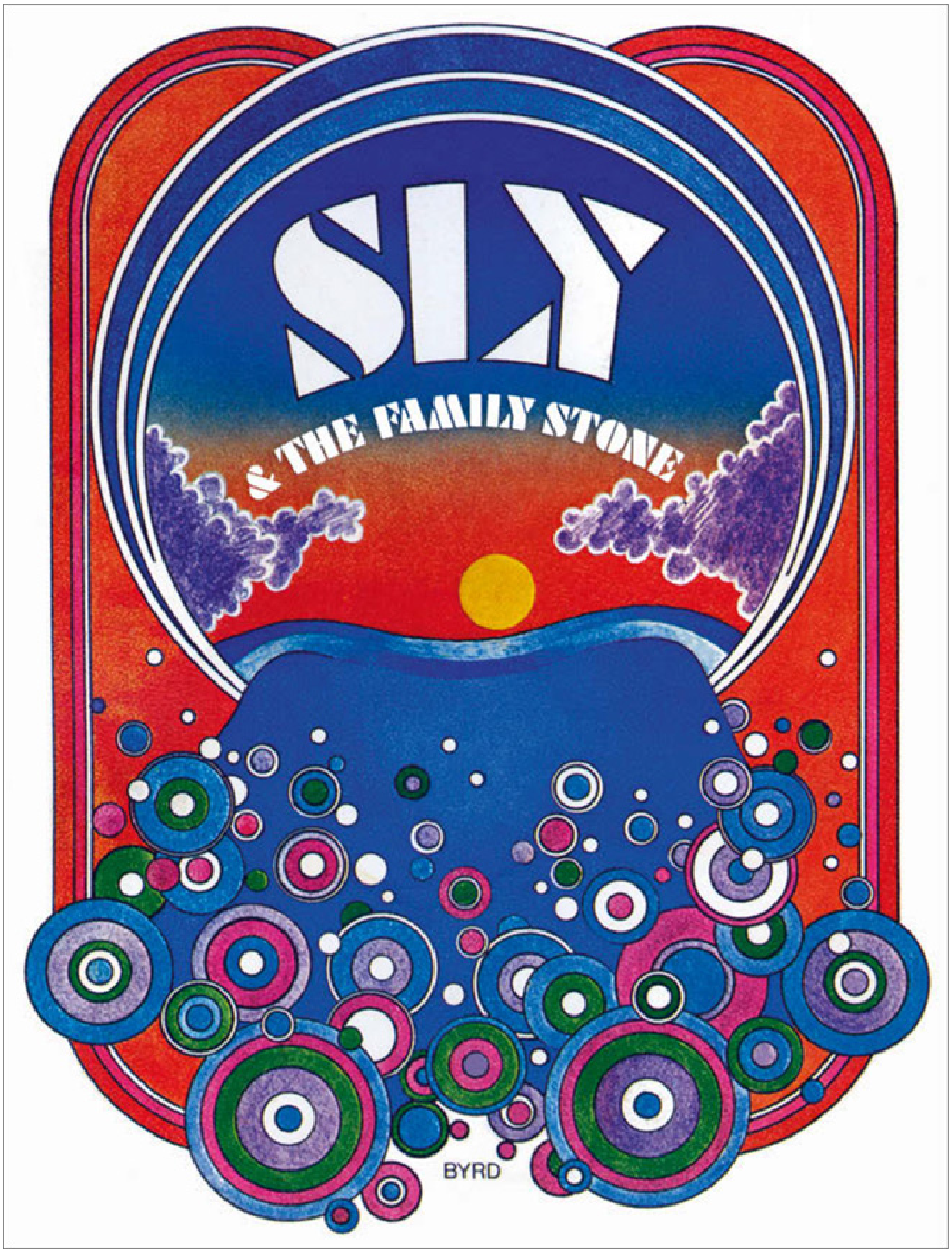
Preliminary sketch, 1998


HEADS
A FOLIO OF
10 POSTERS BY
DAVID EDWARD BYRD

This cover illustration was for a 1998 portfolio of ten Byrd posters, all of which featured heads, including Hendrix, Follies, *and* Godspell.



This 1968 press-kit cover was for the musician Buddy Miles. Byrd called these types of jobs his "$100 specials," due to the low pay and short deadlines.


SLY
& THE FAMILY STONE
BYRD

Byrd's 1969 press-kit cover for Sly and the Family Stone

RVG: Even though you didn't use it in your artwork, you decided to use it for the studio?

DEB: Yeah, I like to be surrounded by yellow because it generates positivity in my mind.

RVG: Getting back to your personal situation, how serious were you with this boyfriend?

DEB: I was pretty serious. We stayed together until ’79. Then in 1980 I came out to LA. By this time I became a big daily drinker. And then I became a drinker-druggie. I met some well-known photographers—the photography district was very near Seventeenth Street—and through them, I got into smoking opium. Opium was the greatest thing I had ever experienced at the time or since. But when you can’t afford opium anymore, you know what happens …

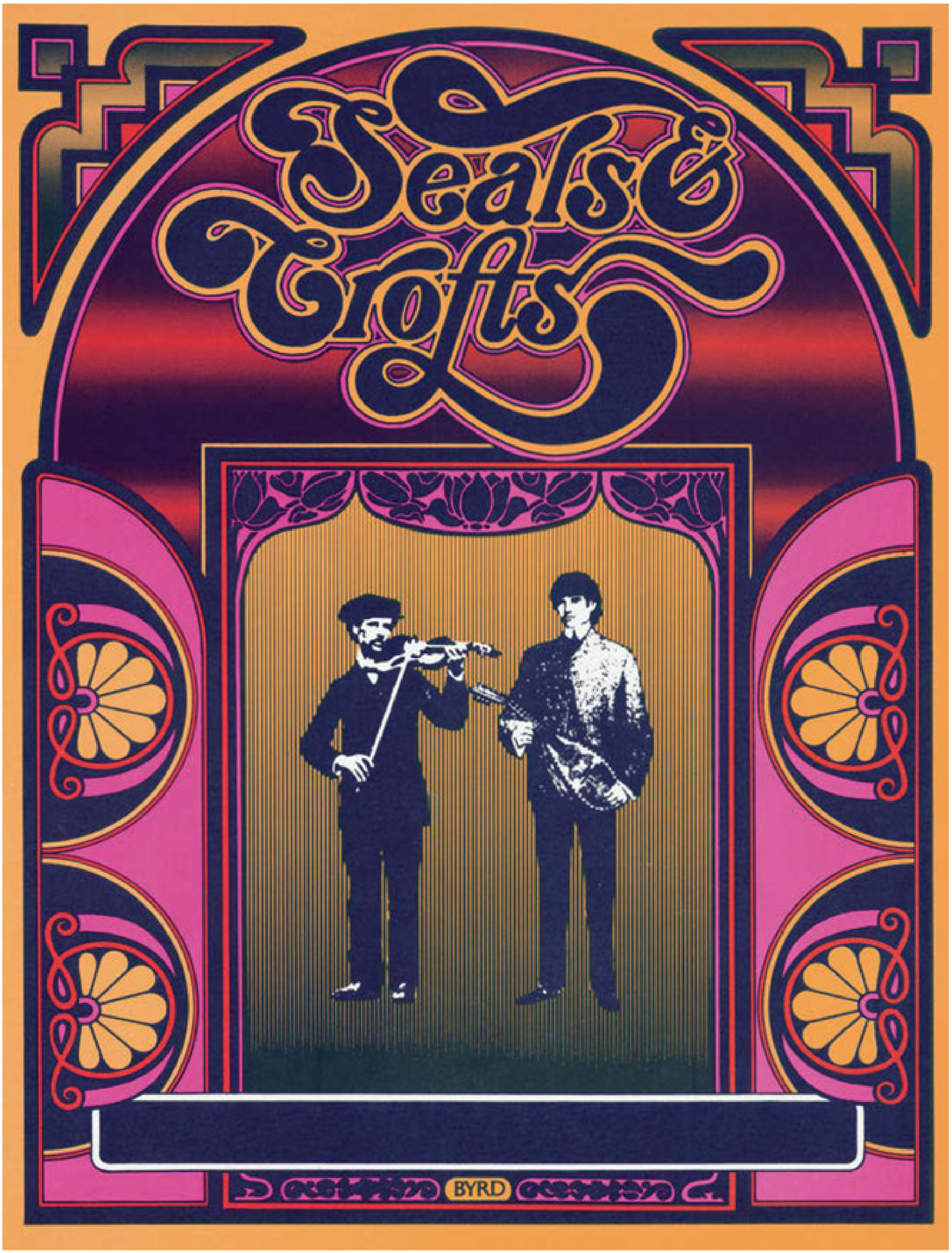
RVG: You go to heroin?

DEB: Exactly. I realized that I had a very addictive personality. I took speed every morning of my life in New York. You know, it was just part of getting up. I was never without speed, but with the speed you need downers when you crash. And then with downers you get back to alcohol, and with alcohol you get back to heroin. The vicious cycle continues.

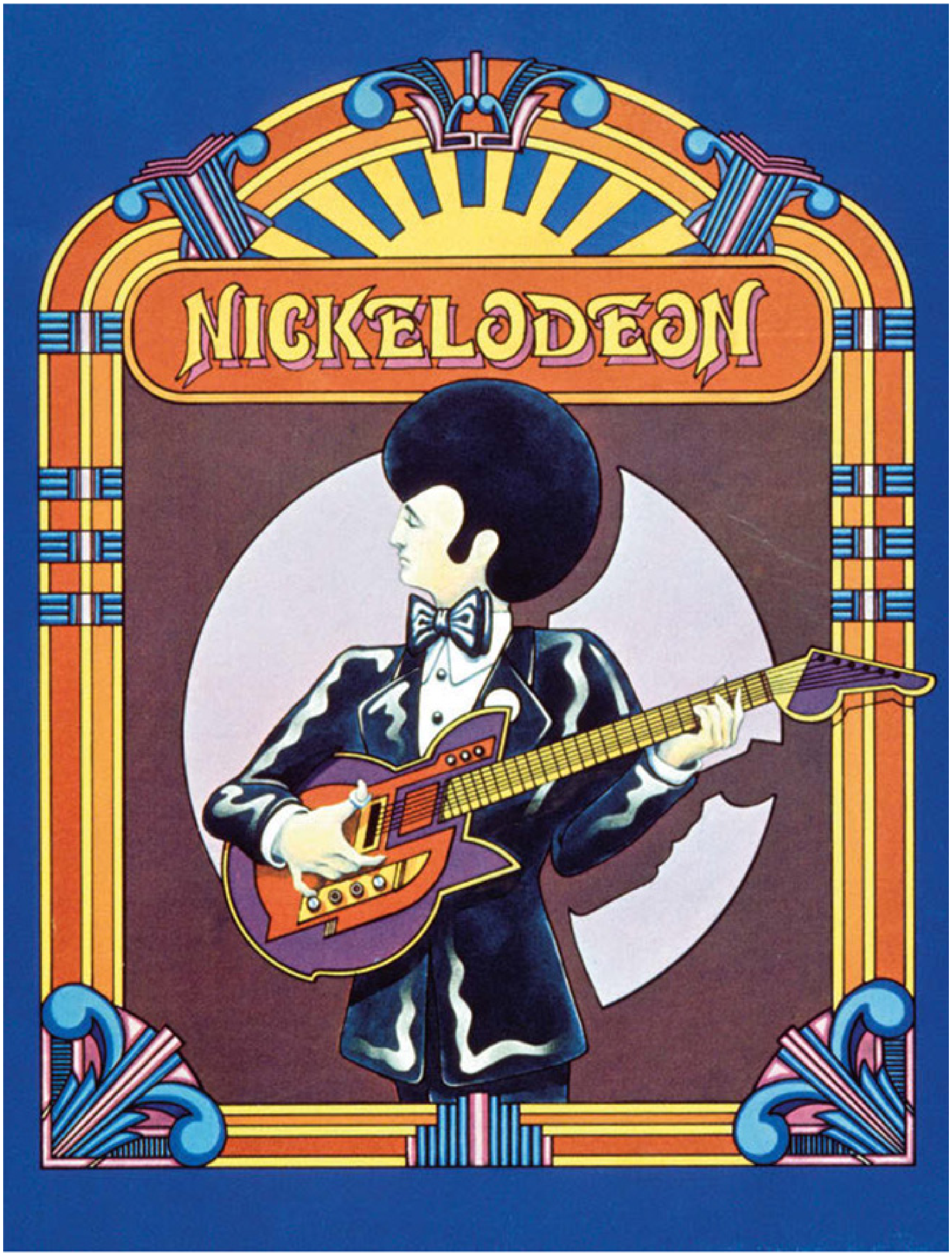
RVG: Did you have any close calls?

DEB: I did OD more than once. Once my friend June rushed me to the Beth Israel emergency room, where they pumped my stomach because I had OD’d on the hypnotic drug Placidyl, a sleeping pill. I was probably in about five rehabs over those ten years. A rehab every other year. New York City was dirty. It was criminal. It was drugs. It was booze. It was smack. It was methadone. It was lowlifes. I magnetically attracted the worst that was out there. It was everything bad. Then one day, I woke up, and I thought, *You know, if you don’t get outta here, you’re gonna die*.

RVG: So you thought that being in New York City was part of it?


Seals & Crofts
BYRD

Poster "blanks," this one designed by Byrd for the 1970 tour of Seals & Crofts, would have the venue and date information pasted into the "snipe box" at the bottom.



Byrd created this 1972 logo and press-kit cover for a rock entertainment start-up that never got off the ground.

DEB: Well, as I said at the time, living in New York City was like having a second job. And it was a really big job, because you had to stay alive. You can't be drunk and high all the time and not be walking on the knife-edge of life. This was something I had chosen: I just became bedraggled, sloppy, and terribly sad. One thing I will never forget was becoming conscious and realizing I was on the sidewalk facedown in a three-piece suit in Midtown Manhattan at rush hour with no idea how I got there. Commuters just stepped over me. I could not stop self-medicating. I felt hopeless.

RVG: Yikes! Had something traumatic happened, or was it just another day?

DEB: It was just another day. Another drink, another shot, another handful of pills, another OD. By now, I was on eighty milligrams of methadone, anti-seizure meds, and nonstop alcohol!

RVG: Your mother was institutionalized for alcohol and drug abuse. Did the irony hit you?

DEB: When I came out to the West Coast, I began seeing a therapist for the first time. A gay psychiatrist. He said to me, “Well, have you noticed that you became an addict at the age your mother became an addict?” And I said, “Oh shit. Oh my God.” I was repeating my mother’s life, but in New York. I had no idea just how horrible it had become.

RVG: People who knew you back then told me about bags of unopened mail.

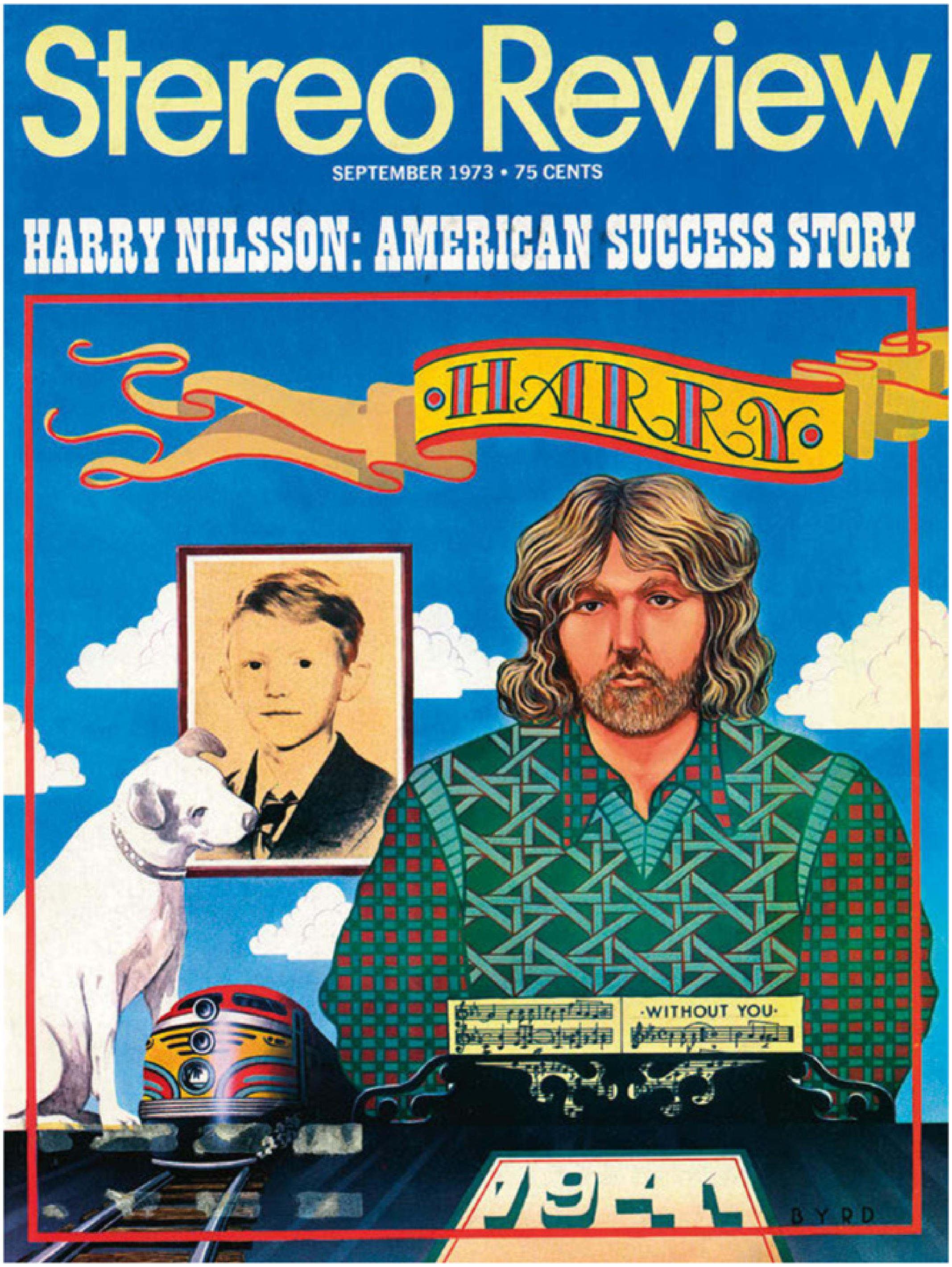
BYRD: When the mail came, I immediately threw it aside. I did not answer the phone. I was a recluse.

RVG: Were you able to work at this point at all?

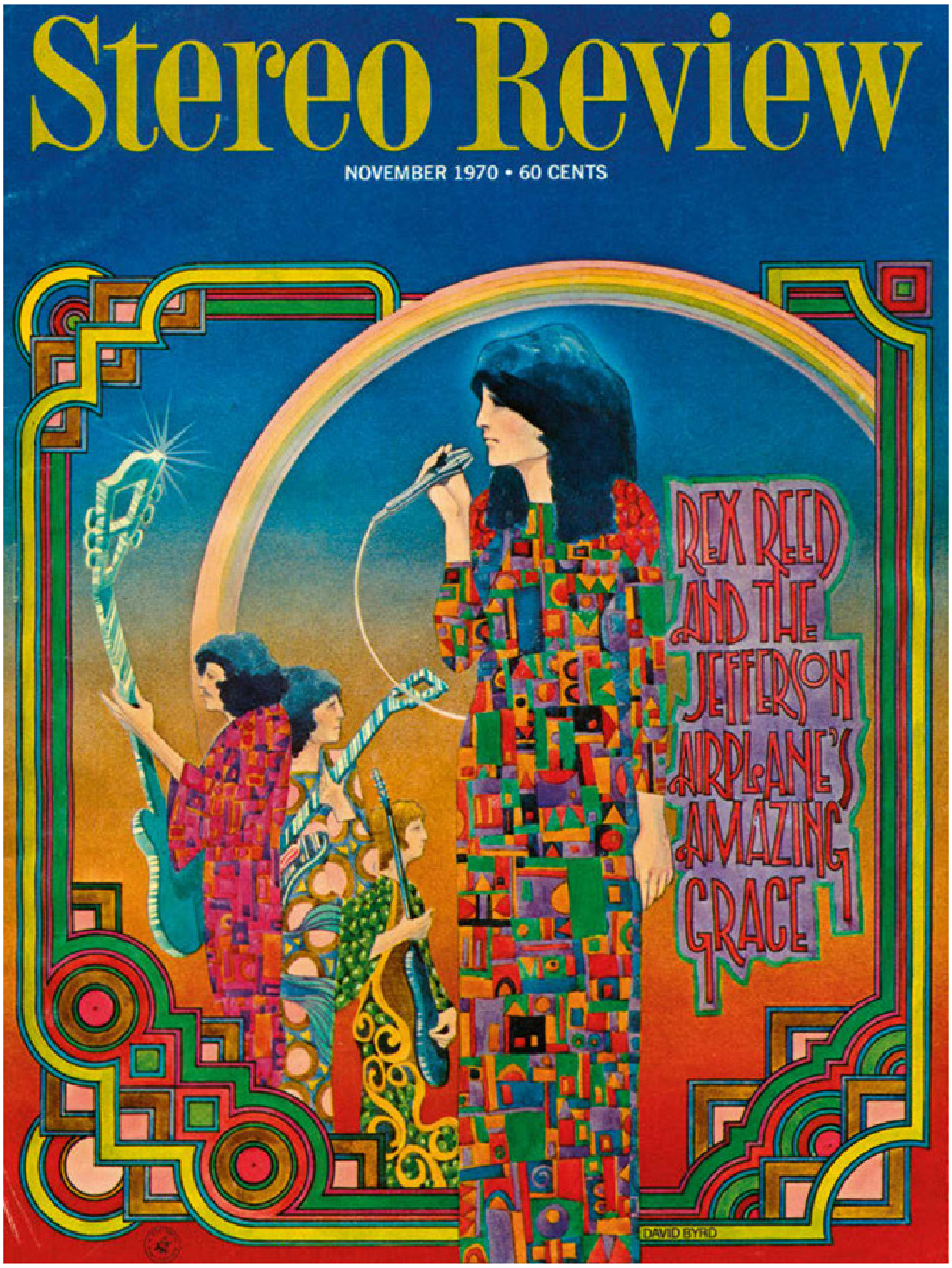
DEB: Yeah, I was working all the time. But I was drunk or stoned, you know? I could drink a bottle of vodka a day.

RVG: Did your work suffer?

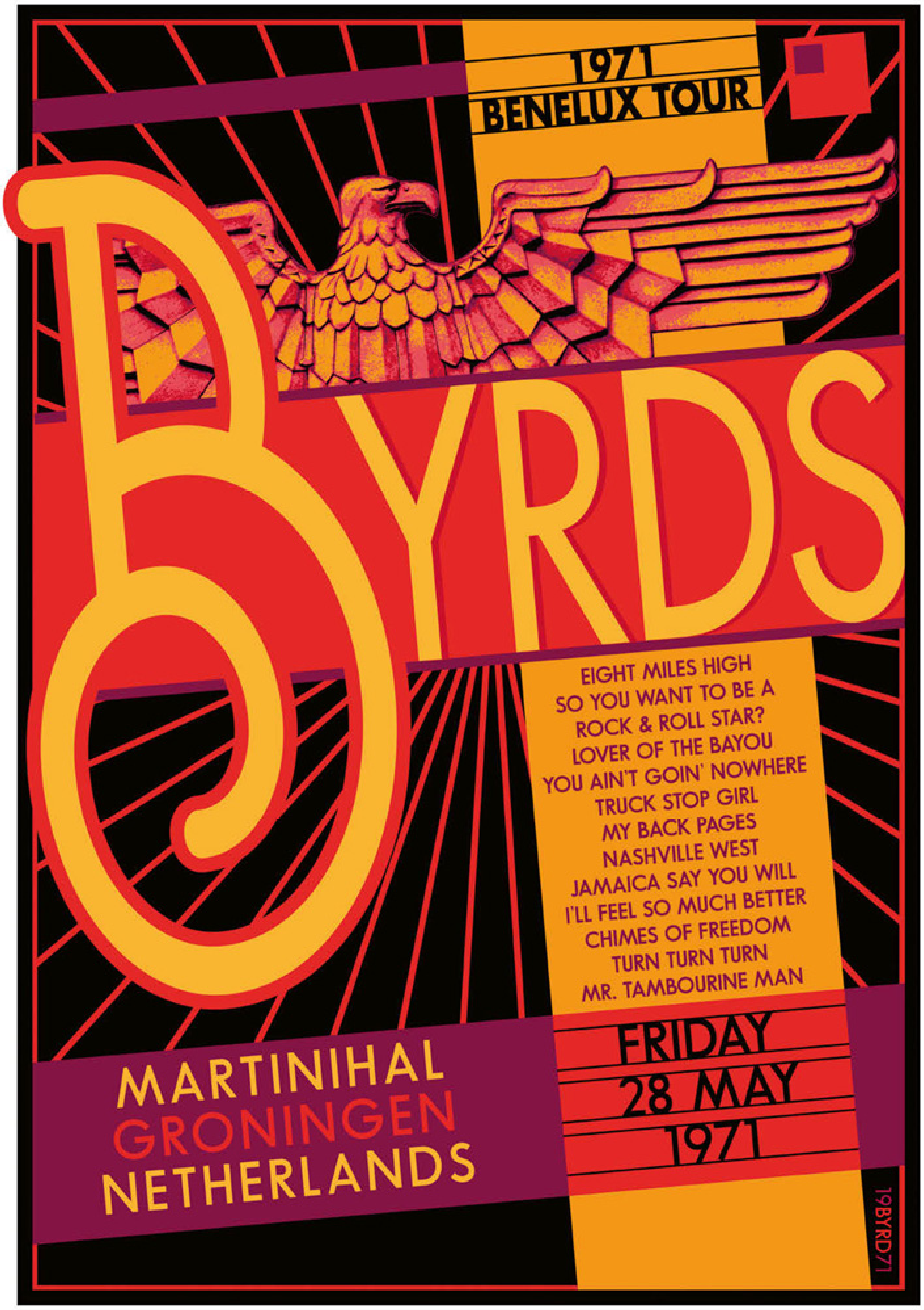
DEB: I don’t think so. It didn’t make me sloppy. I mean, if you drink all the time from morning to night, your body adjusts to it—just don’t run out or the DTs appear, a very unpleasant state of affairs! At the end, I did miss a book cover assignment, as I was in bed with a bottle and could not get up. The worst part was the morning hangover, where you had to quickly down a sixteen-ounce malt liquor and keep it down till you get a buzz and then throw up again. Now you can make a proper martini without the shakes!


Stereo Review
SEPTEMBER 1973 • 75 CENTS
HARRY NILSSON: AMERICAN SUCCESS STORY
HARRY
WITHOUT YOU
1941
BYRD

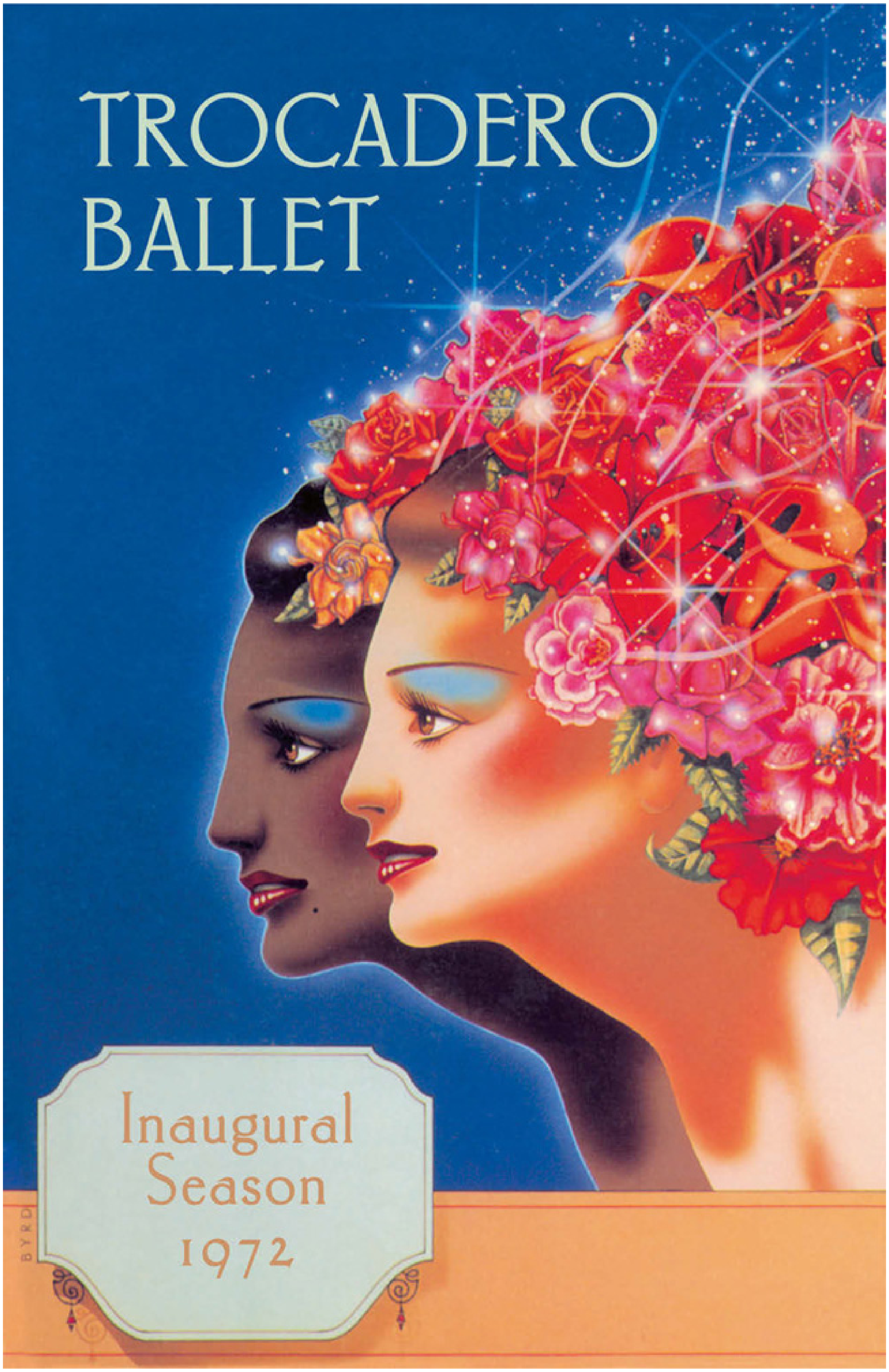
Byrd created several covers for art director Boris Pachowski, including this cover for the September 1973 issue of Stereo Review *magazine, featuring Harry Nilsson*.


Stereo Review
NOVEMBER 1970 • 60 CENTS
REX REED AND THE JEFFERSON AIRPLANE'S AMAZING GRACE
DAVID BYRD

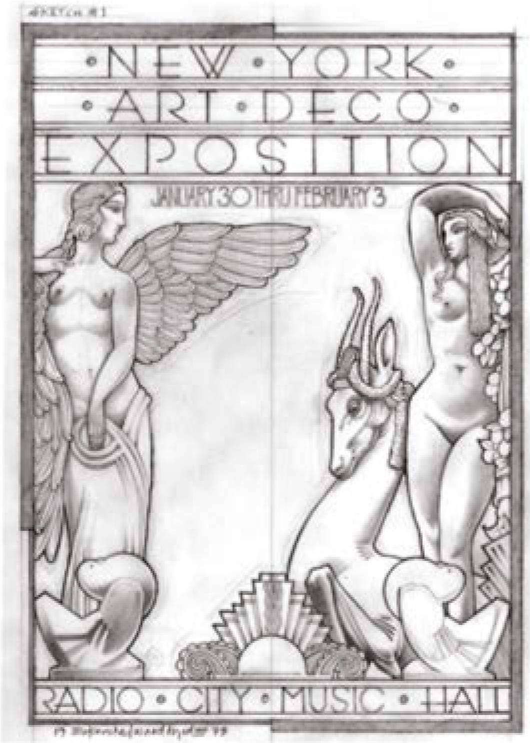
Byrd's cover for the November 1970 issue of Stereo Review *magazine features Jefferson Airplane. The mosaic pattern,* *inspired by Austrian artist Gustav Klimt, was a motif Byrd often returned to.*


1971
BENELUX TOUR
BYRDS
EIGHT MILES HIGH
SO YOU WANT TO BE A
ROCK & ROLL STAR?
LOVER OF THE BAYOU
YOU AIN'T GOIN' NOWHERE
TRUCK STOP GIRL
MY BACK PAGES
NASHVILLE WEST
JAMAICA SAY YOU WILL
I'LL FEEL SO MUCH BETTER
CHIMES OF FREEDOM
TURN TURN TURN
MR. TAMBOURINE MAN
MARTINIHAL
GRONINGEN
NETHERLANDS
FRIDAY
28 MAY
1971
19BYRD71

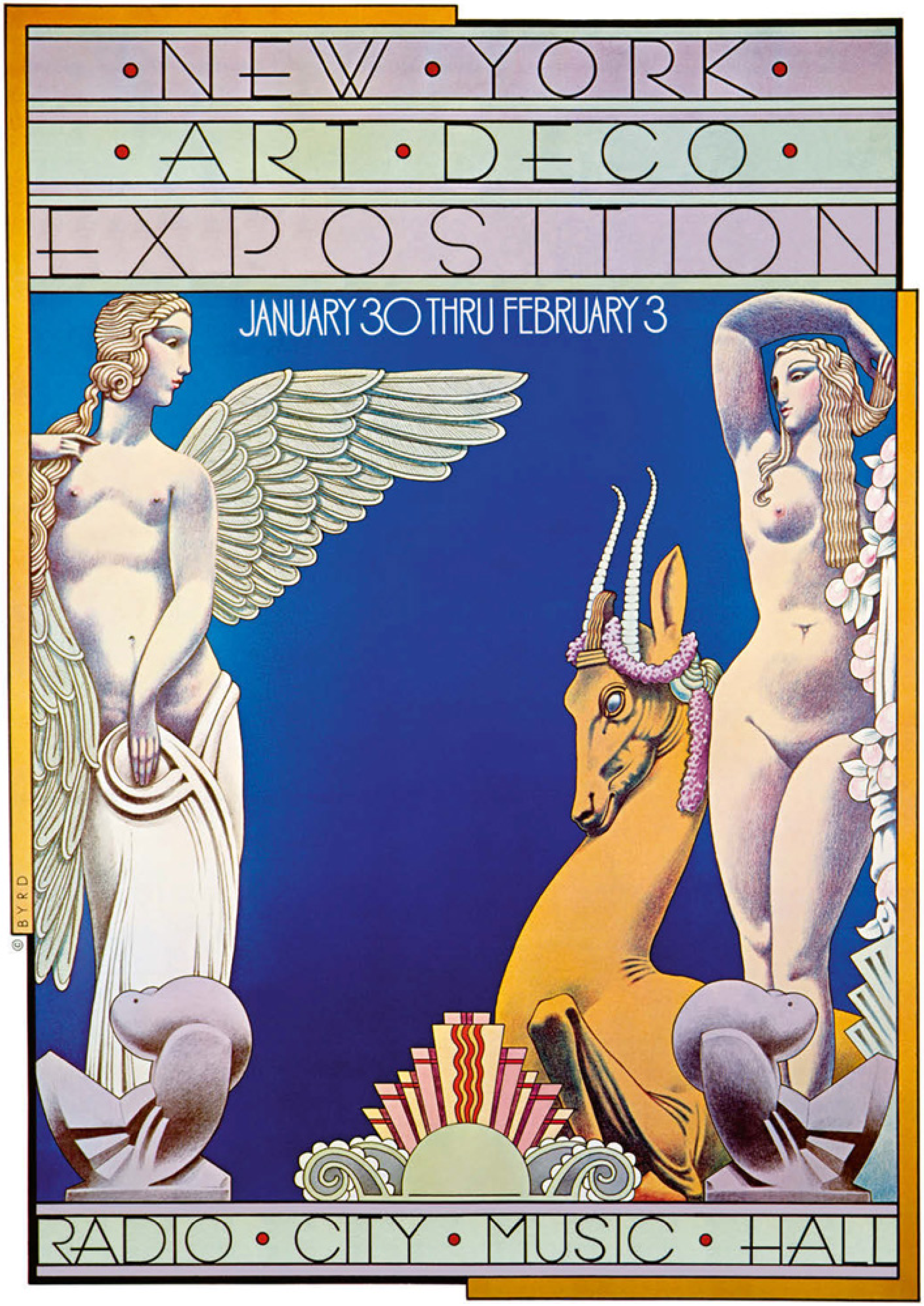
Byrd's 2015 "tribute poster" commemorates a 1971 Dutch concert by the Byrds. At the urging of impresario Bill Graham, Byrd later created posters for memorable concerts that never had original posters produced for them.


TROCADERO
BALLET
Inaugural
Season
1972
BYRD

Byrd's poster for the all-male drag ballet troupe Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, 1972


SKETCH #1
NEW YORK
ART DECO
EXPOSITION
JANUARY 30 THRU FEBRUARY 3
RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Byrd's concept pencil sketch for the New York Art Deco Exposition, 1974


NEW YORK
ART DECO
EXPOSITION
JANUARY 30 THRU FEBRUARY 3
RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
© BYRD

The finished poster for the 1974 New York Art Deco Exposition was one of Byrd's favorite works and was later enlarged to seven feet high for his 2011 retrospective at the Brand Library & Art Center in Burbank.

HENDRIX

1968

Immersing himself in the New York City commercial art world, Byrd scores a plum assignment: creating a Fillmore East poster for Jimi Hendrix. There's no way the artist could have known that his 1968 design would become one of rock music's more iconic images. His career was taking off, but in a few short years the scene would change, and so would Byrd.

Robert von Goeben: You had a long history doing art for Bill Graham at the Fillmore East. How did you meet him?

David Edward Byrd: Josh White of the Joshua Light Show and Kip Cohen, the general manager of the Fillmore East, both went to Carnegie Tech with me. They contacted me to do posters for a rock music venue they were helping to create in an old Yiddish theater in New York's East Village. They had both been drama students; I was the only visual artist they knew. My first poster was for a concert featuring the bands Traffic, Blue Cheer, and Iron Butterfly. Bill Graham liked this effort, so he asked me to create a poster for Jefferson Airplane, which was the next weekend show at the venue on May 3 and 4, 1968. I based that design on a project I was given by my freshman design teacher at CIT, which was to create a modern-day subject using an ancient design style. I showed a supermarket with bouffanted ladies with their shopping carts full of groceries in the ancient Egyptian pictorial style. Applying this idea, I created an Egyptian biplane with the band playing on the top wing. Many people did not understand that the airplane was coming at you in a frontal mode. It shows Grace Slick as an Egyptian queen holding a guitar, though she did not play an instrument more complex than a tambourine. This poster was also inspired by Victor Moscoso's *Sopwith Camel* poster, which remains a personal favorite.

The next poster I created for Bill was for the Jimi Hendrix Experience on May 10 of 1968. I first did this little doodle of Jimi with the electric hair, and I decided I was gonna use this deep bluish green for the main background color scheme, that being one of my favorite colors. I showed Jimi this first sketch, and he said, "Oh, I really like this, but I want you to put my bandmates [Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding] where the quarter moons are, so that the entire Experience group is on the poster. Just paste them over the quarter moons." I thought that was a terrible idea, so I didn't do it! I was so dumb about the sketch process, I went and created my first design in full color, ready to print. I created a new pencil sketch with the requested changes on an entirely new poster with an orange background color scheme—another favorite color—and the rest is history, to use a cliché.

RVG: So, you went all the way to finished art just to sell the original concept?

DEB: Absolutely. I was a nobody, and I wanted to dazzle them.

RVG: Was this something you did often to sell a concept?

DEB: Sometimes, yes. You know, people are so strange, especially people who are buying art. Many times, they don't really know much about art. But this was in the beginning of my career, and at that time I just wanted to get regular jobs. So I went whole hog on the final in order to hopefully knock their socks off with a very complex design.

RVG: Talk a bit about the type on the Jimi Hendrix poster, because it's conventional and quite different from the psychedelic type they were doing at the Fillmore West.

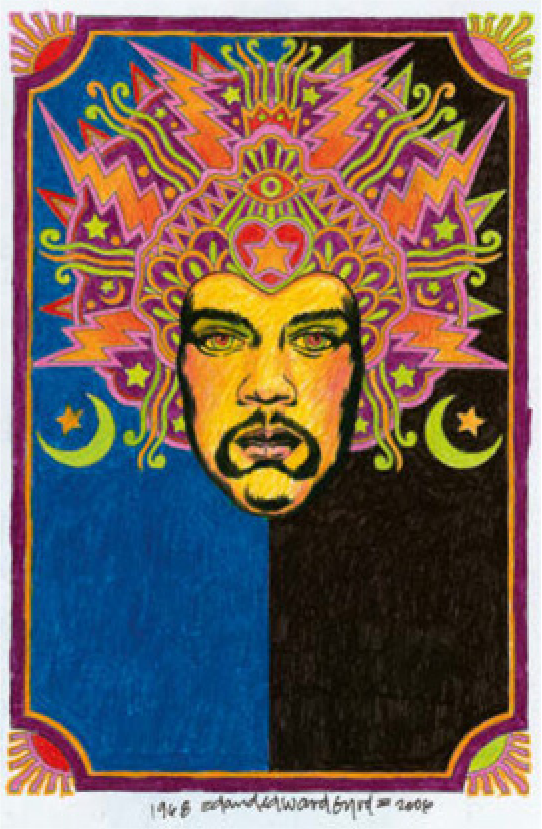
DEB: It's very important to note that I knew nothing about type. I studied to be a painter and a lithographer. I never had a typography course, so I honestly didn't know anything about type or its amazing history. I was frightened by lettering because it was so seemingly exact. So I used presstype, which in those days was rub-off letters in standard point sizes. I don't know why I chose that typeface, because today I feel it's kind of stupid. It's named Clarendon, and it's what I call an "old lady" typeface. But I was drawn to the fact that it was kind of black and beefy, and back then there were not a lot of choices available in presstype. I was very embarrassed about my lack of typographic knowledge at the time. But I was on a deadline and had to do what I could. I would rarely take a chance using some technique with which I was unfamiliar, such as hand lettering.

RVG: The circle design is incredibly detailed. This is one poster where we should talk about technique.

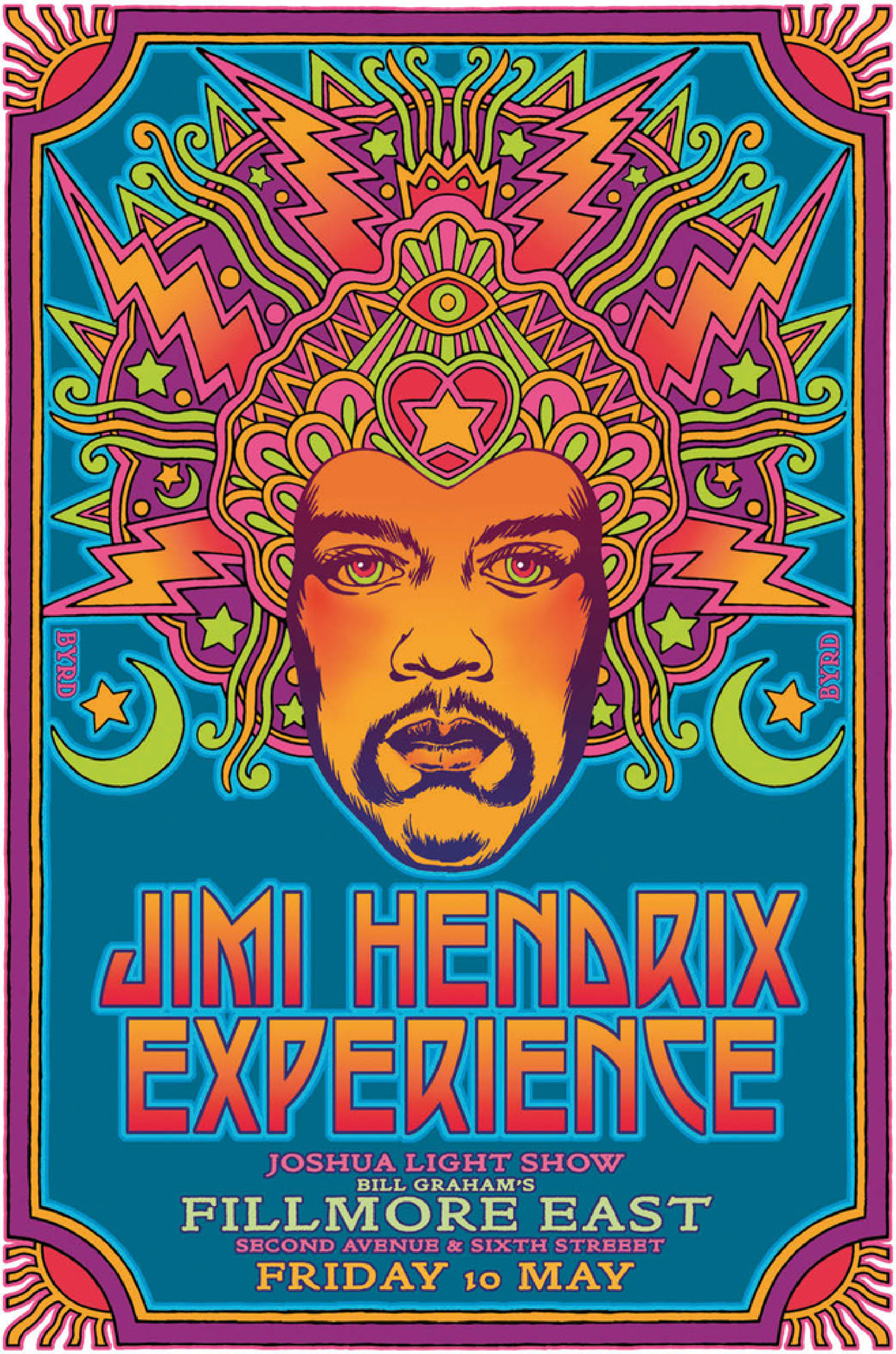
DEB: Remember, there were no computers in 1968—except perhaps for "Brainiac." I inked everything in the image. With drafting tools, I drew the hexagonal grid, and then on the grid crossing points I put little quarter-inch circles in pencil where one line on the grid crosses another. Then I would build up all these pencil circles in ink. I had this tiny compass called a drop-bow compass, which had this little pincer that had one drop of ink in it. You twirled it around and made a circle, and you just hoped it wouldn't blob! So, you have to hold your breath and hope it works. I had to do that on every little circle on the grid. I had no room for error, as I planned to use Dr. Martin's transparent dyes to fill the circles and rosettes. Today, I could not nor would not do this by hand. With the computer and Adobe Illustrator, yes, but by hand? *No way*! Then, when they went to produce it, the printer had to mask the different colors by cutting this masking film called rubylith. They had to cut every little circle by hand. Later on, I had to do it myself. Clients couldn't afford my posters since they required so much work at the rubylith lightbox, and it's a bitch. Oh, call the police! You wanna kill yourself after a while!

RVG: Bill Graham really loved this poster, right?

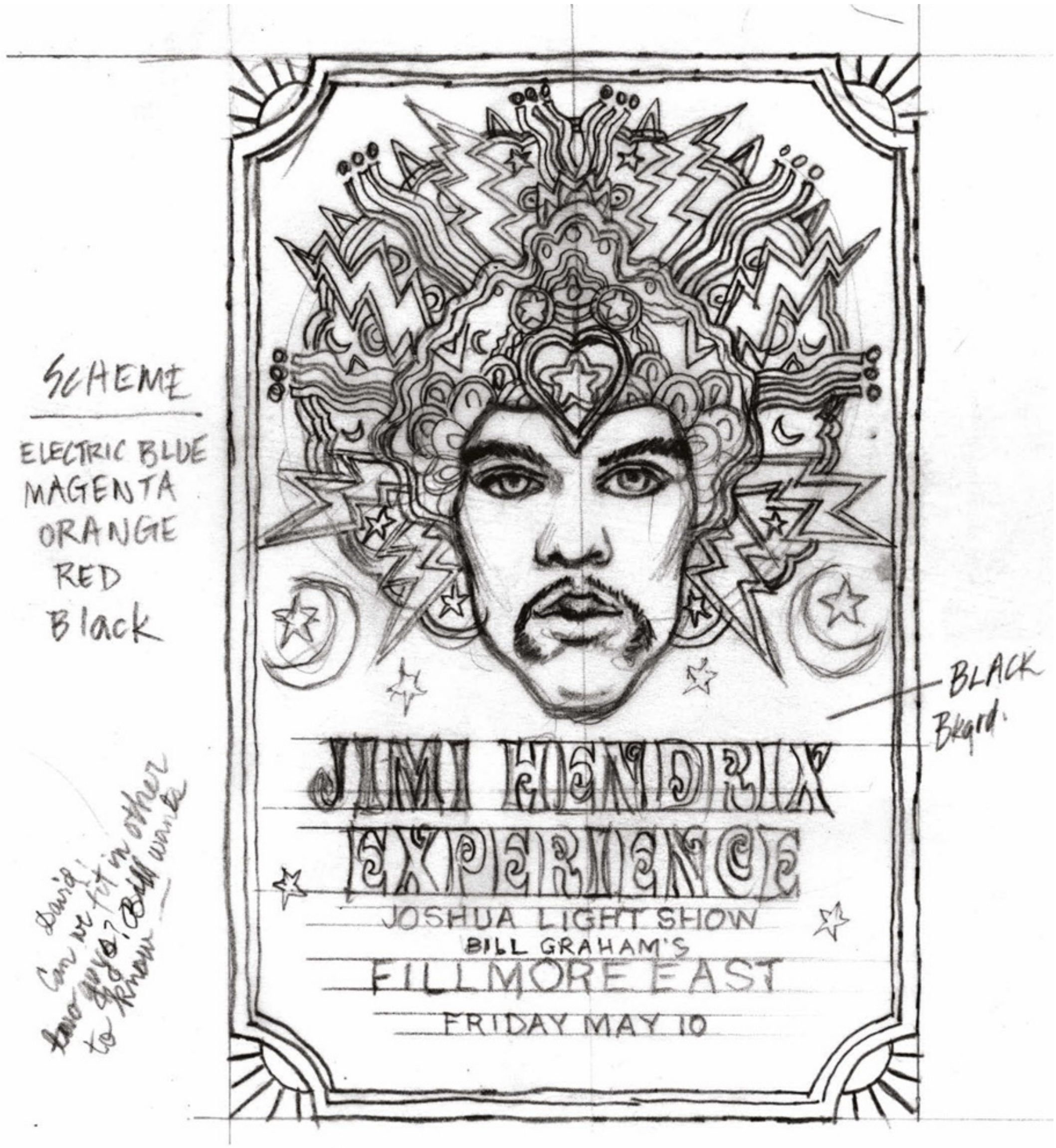
DEB: Yes. So much so that in 1988, he printed a limited-edition Hendrix poster for the Fillmore East's twentieth anniversary, and he matched every color perfectly. He must have spent a lot of money, because I've never seen such a perfectly matched printing job. It looks exactly like the original, but for the size, which was made larger by a half inch in each direction in order to protect those who had an original 1968 print, which I'm told is now going for a very high price. I sold all my copies long ago, alas.



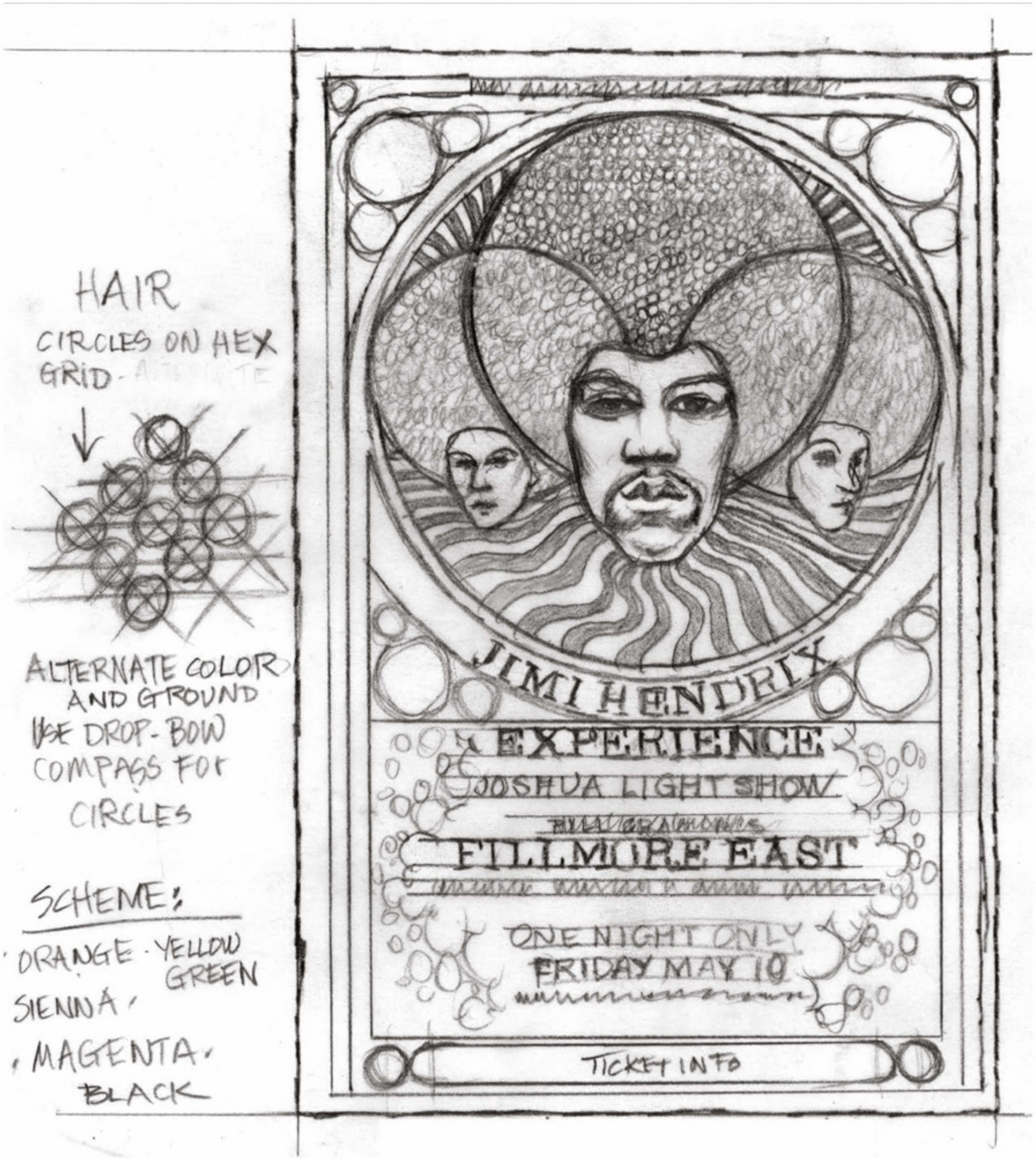
When this preliminary drawing of Byrd's original design for the 1968 Jimi Hendrix concert at the Fillmore East was presented, Hendrix wanted Byrd to include the two other members of the band (Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell), which led Byrd in a different creative direction.


BYRD
BYRD
JIMI HENDRIX
EXPERIENCE
JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW
BILL GRAHAM'S
FILLMORE EAST
SECOND AVENUE & SIXTH STREET
FRIDAY 10 MAY

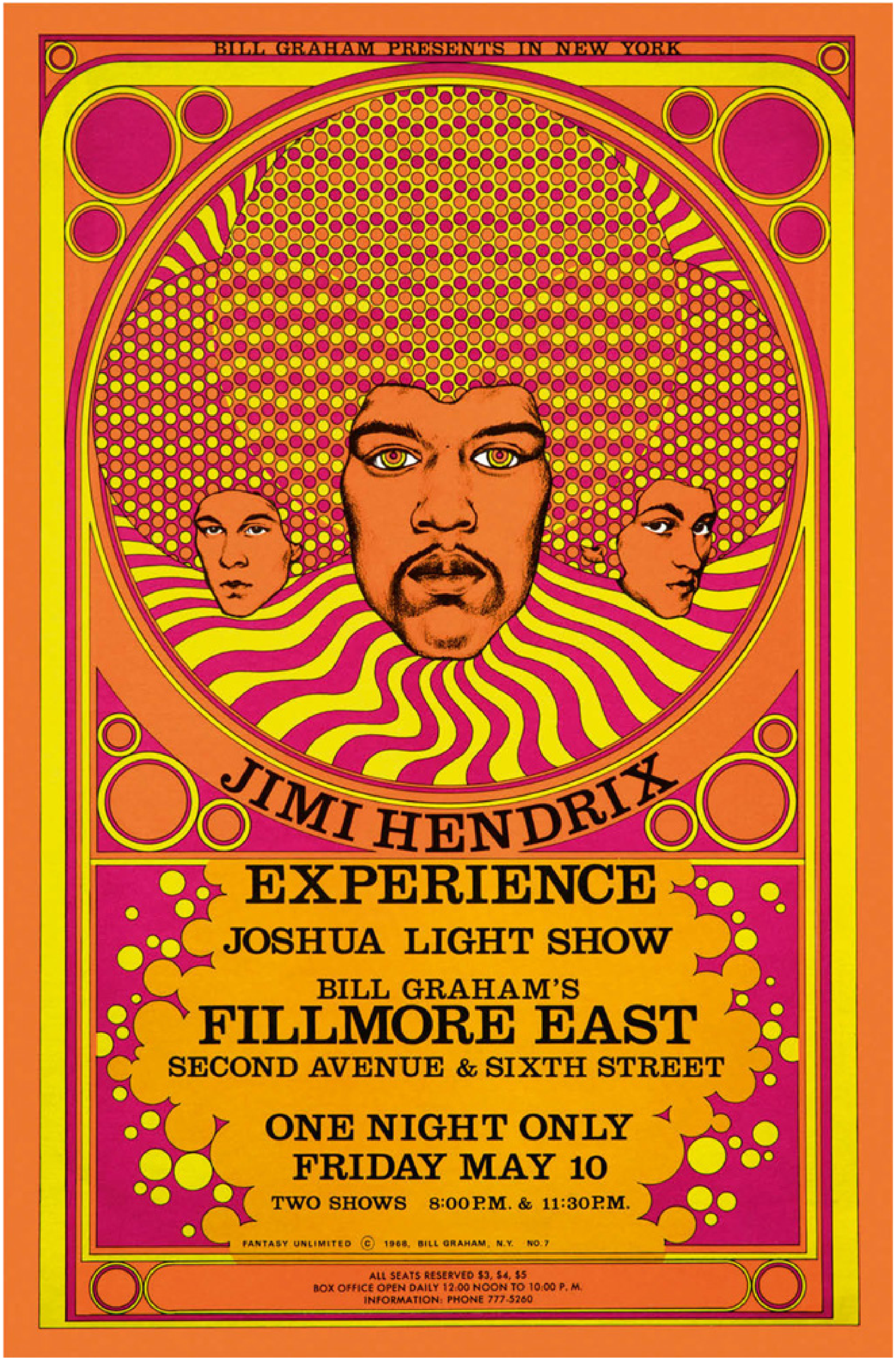
Many decades later, Byrd picked up his original concept sketch and turned it into a finished poster.


SCHEME
ELECTRIC BLUE
MAGENTA
ORANGE
RED
Black
BLACK
Bkgrd.
JIMI HENDRIX
EXPERIENCE
JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW
BILL GRAHAM'S
FILLMORE EAST
FRIDAY MAY 10
David!
Can we fit in other
two guys? Bill wants
to know

The original sketch for Byrd's 1968 Jimi Hendrix poster includes a note from Fillmore East general manager Kip Cohen asking, "Can we fit in the other two guys [Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell]? Bill [Graham] wants to know." Subsequently, Byrd came up with an alternate concept, including a different color scheme.


HAIR
CIRCLES ON HEX GRID - ALTERNATE
ALTERNATE COLOR AND GROUND
USE DROP-BOW COMPASS FOR CIRCLES
SCHEME:
ORANGE · YELLOW GREEN
SIENNA ·
MAGENTA ·
BLACK
JIMI HENDRIX
EXPERIENCE
JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW
FILLMORE EAST
ONE NIGHT ONLY
FRIDAY MAY 10
TICKET INFO

Byrd used this pencil sketch for his highly complex final design for the 1968 Hendrix poster. He chose an intricate geometric pattern for the hair, utilizing a hexagonal grid of circles. Later, Byrd was told this was one of the most complex posters the Fillmore had ever printed.


BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK

JIMI HENDRIX
EXPERIENCE
JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW
BILL GRAHAM'S
FILLMORE EAST
SECOND AVENUE & SIXTH STREET

ONE NIGHT ONLY
FRIDAY MAY 10
TWO SHOWS 8:00 P.M. & 11:30 P.M.

FANTASY UNLIMITED © 1968, BILL GRAHAM, N.Y. NO.7

ALL SEATS RESERVED $3, $4, $5
BOX OFFICE OPEN DAILY 12:00 NOON TO 10:00 P. M.
INFORMATION: PHONE 777-5260

Byrd's final design for the 1968 appearance of the Jimi Hendrix Experience at the Fillmore East is now considered one of the most iconic rock images of all time—this poster was voted #8 in the Top 25 Rock Posters by Billboard *magazine.*

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RVG: He must have loved that the type was legible.

DEB: Yeah. It was kind of a New York thing, because in advertising it's about the marriage of word *and* image. The popular wag was you couldn't read the words in the West Coast posters unless you were stoned, and I never thought that worked, nor at the time could I achieve that style because I didn't know shit about type! All those guys on the West Coast were inventing the type. But I'd have to do these things fast and couldn't muck around. But around this time, I visited San Francisco and went to a party at the house of artist Wilfried Sätty. His entire house was an underground cave, and it was covered in Middle Eastern carpets. One of the posters he had hanging, among all these West Coast artists, was my Jimi Hendrix poster. I felt I had arrived. Sätty was a collage artist who was the mentor of my West Coast artist friend, David Singer. David would stay with me when he came to New York City. I think Singer created more posters for Bill Graham than anyone else. Sätty gave Singer his steel German collage scissors, sharpener, and magnifying loop, and Singer was off to the races. In my opinion, Singer's West Coast posters are the best of the lot. Extraordinarily inspired! I personally think a poster is great when I wish I had done it.

RVG: The precision in your Hendrix poster is unbelievable. Where did all this come from?

DEB: Well, before I came to the commune, I had been in Pittsburgh and worked with an art professor at Carnegie Tech on a project about the seventeen different forms of symmetry in crystals—translation, rotation, reflection, tessellation, etc. So for me, the circles that make up the hair represent the lights you see when you press your fingers against your eyeballs, or when you eat acid or imbibe mushrooms. So that's what I did for all the hair. You'll notice the colors change if you stare at the dots—you can see where they overlap and subtly change the colors. I just tried to keep up with the seemingly endless herd of psychedelic artists that were cranking out posters of astonishing originality!

RVG: But along with all those, this Hendrix poster became an iconic image of the times.

DEB: Yes, my Jimi Hendrix poster was chosen by Pratt Institute as one of the hundred most important designs of the twentieth century created by a Pratt teacher or alumnus.

RVG: Did you see the Hendrix concert?

DEB: *Yes*—front row! I had an arrangement with Bill that I got front row seats to any show I did the poster for. I felt Jimi's sweat flying through the air!

RVG: Also around this time, Hendrix invited you to his Electric Lady Studios, right?

DEB: Yeah. He asked me to come to his office to talk about his press kit … or he had someone ask me to come to his office, which was a little storefront walk-in office on East Sixteenth Street, as I recall. When I went in the office, Chas Chandler, Jimi's manager and former bassist for the Animals, was there at a desk. Jimi was in another room in the back where I went and talked with him. We were talking about his art, and I remember it was very important to have "moon maidens" on his press kit folder. He told me he was building a recording studio on Eighth Street in an old club he had bought in the west village. He had just finished the control room, and did I want to see it? I said, "Well, of course!" So I went to Electric Lady with him, moseying across Eighth Street to the West Village.

RVG: Did anyone recognize him on the street?

DEB: No, though there was the occasional hippie wave. The studio was previously a nightclub venue called the Generation, at which Jimi and his musician friends would often perform. When we arrived, we had to go down some steps, and inside, to the left, was the control room. We went in there, and you could see through the glass windows the room where the musicians would play. And the control room we were in had all the soundboards and recording devices of impressive complexity. We sat down on adjacent stools there, and he lit up a big fat reefer, and we smoked. I took one hit, and I was just blasted into a soft, floaty high. Then he came over and put these big earphones on my head. I had never worn large professional earphones before. We listened to the whole *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, which was relatively new on the scene. We both smiled while it played to our stoned heads. I felt I was creating the music as I listened to it.

RVG: Did he have a pair of headphones on as well?

DEB: Oh yeah! Oh, he just thought this was fabulous. And it *was* fabulous! I mean, we really heard it. I really heard every glockenspiel, you know.

RVG: Was there interaction in between, or were you just silently listening?

DEB: Not while we were listening. He was fooling around with controls until he thought the sound was just perfect. Then we would smoke a little more, and he would smile, and I would smile, and it was just, *wow*. I was blown away. And afterward, we had a really nice conversation. We talked about the Beatles … He was very soft-spoken. A very sweet, soft-spoken man. He was like a pal. I mean, he was someone I would be glad to know.

RVG: At this point, had you done the orange poster yet?

DEB: Oh yeah, he loved the orange poster. He just thought it was the greatest.

RVG: Amazing. How did the day end?

DEB: Well, we hugged—him in his always gorgeous and bejeweled finery and me in my hippie overalls and many cheap necklaces. He went east, and I went west. Never the twain shall meet. Then I created his press-kit cover, which became a 1969 tour poster later, unbeknownst to me until way after it was printed. I never knew about all these shenanigans, and I never would have approved its use as a tour poster. This became the poster for the 1969 Jimi Hendrix US and Canadian tour. That turned it into a poster so rare, it goes at auction for big bucks—due to its rarity, not its subpar design. Everything about it is bad. Number one, the three guys are badly drawn, and all this stuff with the stars all coming to this one point—ugh! At the time, I must've thought this was really cool, but to me now, it's just ugly.

RVG: Noel Redding was obviously part of the band, but on some posters, it reads "also Noel Redding." Do you know why that would have been included like that?

DEB: Something that happened along the way that I don't know about. The bandmates were always fighting about something to do with money and ego. Noel Redding demanded to be on this poster at this venue, I guess. I'm just guessing, I don't know. Who knows? But it's just an ugly poster. I wouldn't want to have it in my house! Do you think it's ugly?

RVG: It's iconic of the time, but it doesn't seem up to your usual standard. It almost looks half finished.

DEB: Yeah, I'm embarrassed.

RVG: Let me ask you this question: after you did the orange poster and you did this tour poster, did you ever work with Hendrix or see him again?

DEB: No, he died soon afterward.

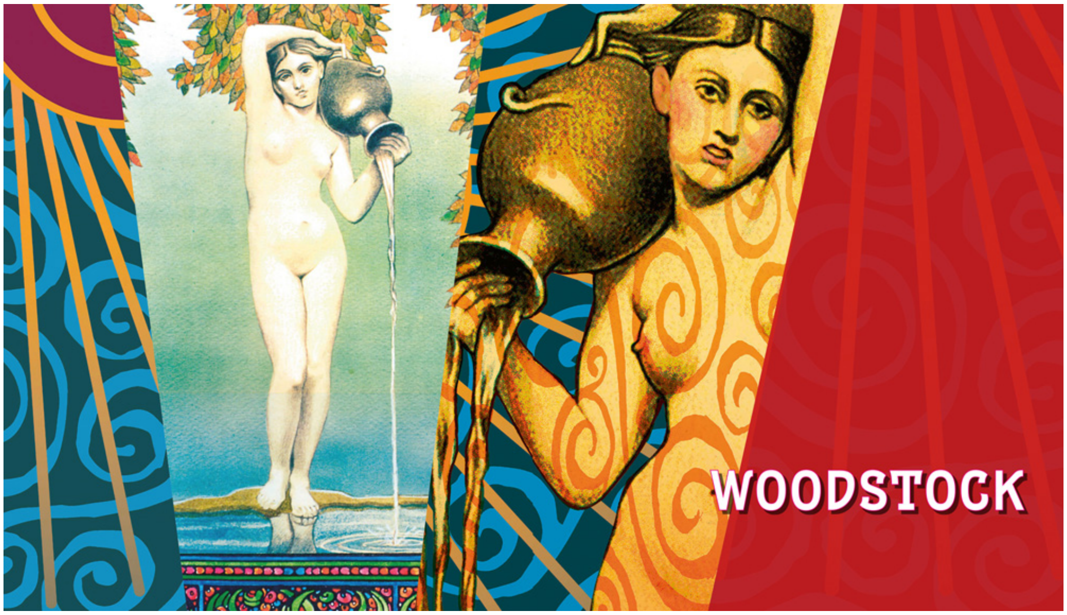
RVG: Do you remember how you felt when he died?

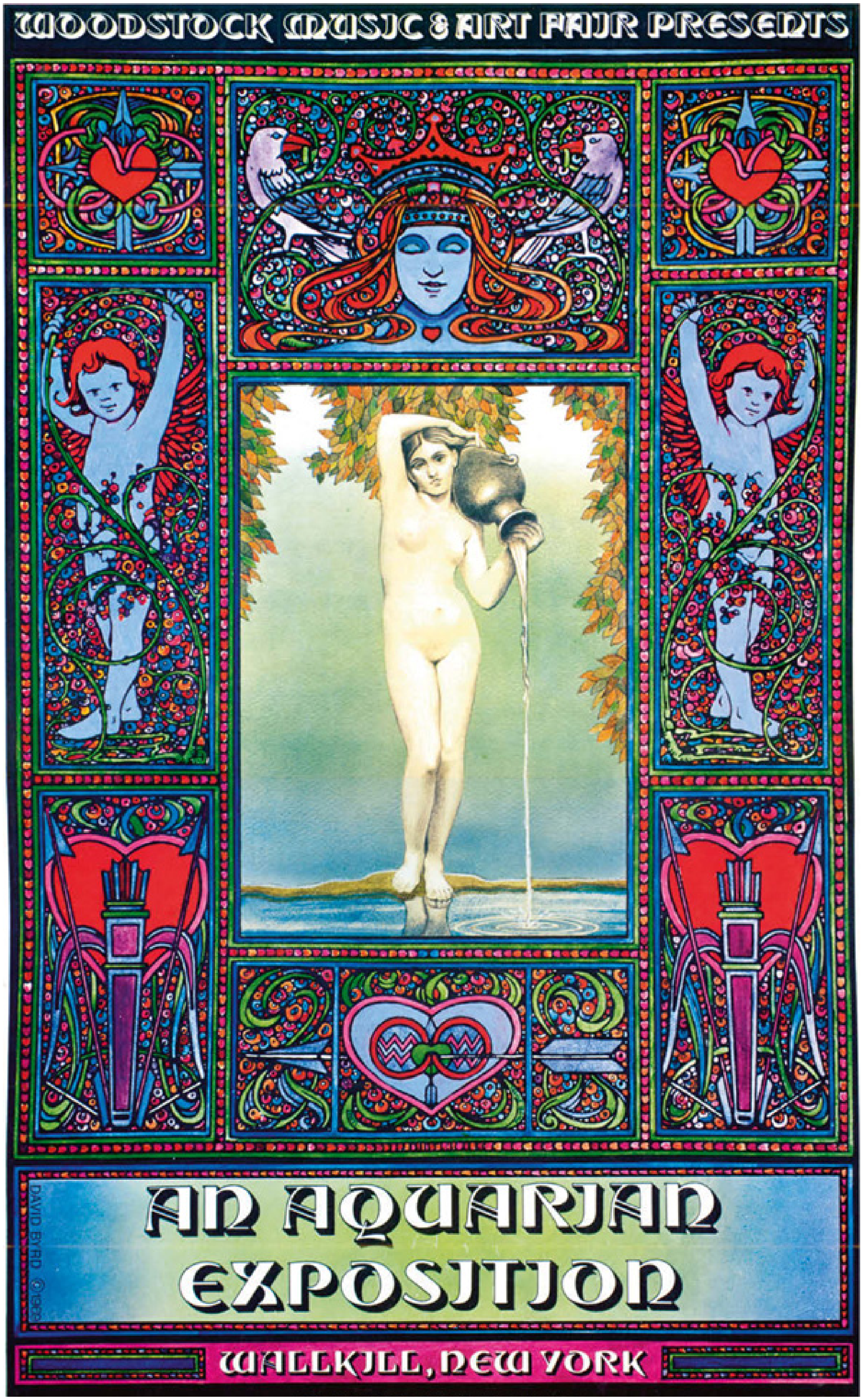
DEB: Yeah, the same as I felt when all the other ones died. Everyone was dying of overdoses! I remember when the Fillmore closed in '71, I asked Bill Graham why he was closing. I had to do the final poster. Bill asked me to include all the acts that appeared at the Fillmore East—which left no room on the poster for art, alas. People say it looks like a WWII memorial. And Bill and Kip kept calling with bands they forgot to add. But it was what Bill wanted, so it's what I did. Anyway, on closing the Fillmore, Bill said, "We started off with marijuana, but now it's red wine and red birds.

And I’m sick and fucking tired of cleaning up vomit. So, I’m closing the joint down!”

RVG: Did you notice that the scene was changing as well?

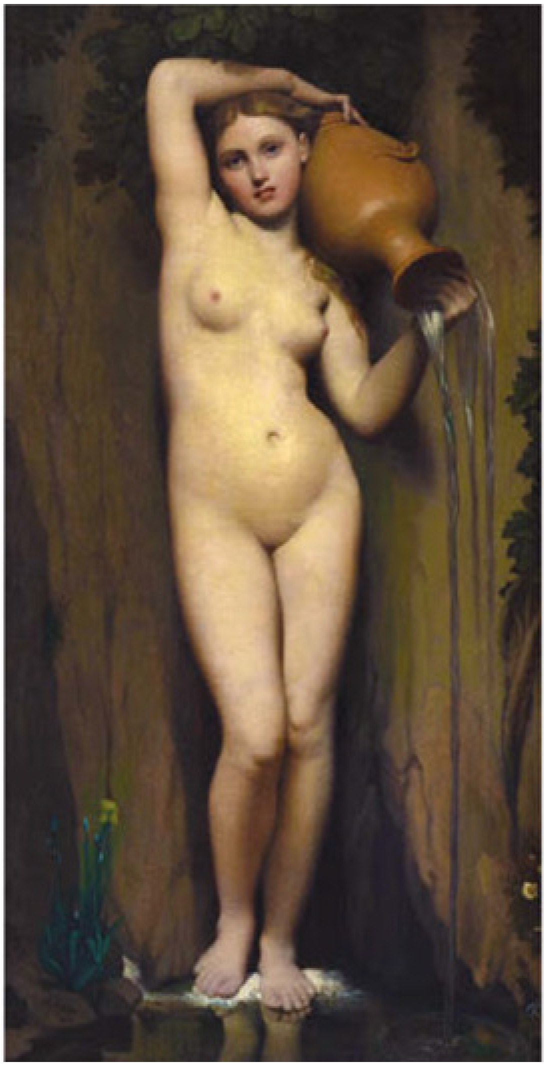
DEB: I probably was aware of it, but I was in the process of changing myself. It was a different scene by ’71. The next decade for me would include besotted success and a slide into addictive mental despair.


WOODSTOCK

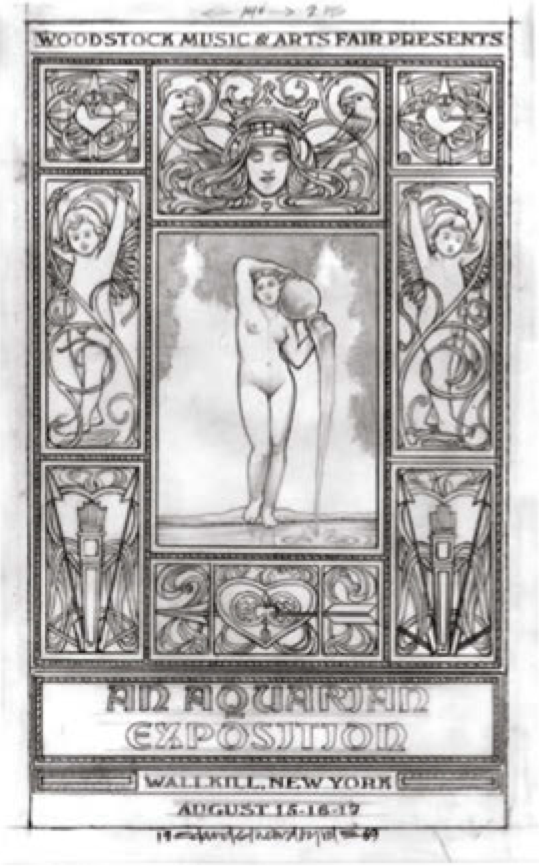

WOODSTOCK MUSIC & ART FAIR PRESENTS
AN AQUARIAN EXPOSITION
WALLKILL, NEW YORK
DAVID BYRD ©1969

AUGUST 15·16·17

Byrd delivered this poster for the 1969 Aquarian Exposition concert, which would later be known as "Woodstock," then left for a Caribbean vacation. The poster was described by the Wallkill, New York, city council as "obscene." In his absence, an alternate poster was commissioned from artist Arnold Skolnick, which became the famous "bird and guitar" design. Decades later, a stock of these original printed posters was discovered in a warehouse.



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's 1856 painting La Source *served as Byrd's inspiration for his Woodstock design. A classically trained painter, Byrd often brought influences from acclaimed master artists into his designs*.



WOODSTOCK MUSIC & ARTS FAIR PRESENTS
AN AQUARIAN
EXPOSITION
WALLKILL, NEW YORK
AUGUST 15-16-17

Original pencil sketch for Byrd's Woodstock poster

1969

Byrd gets a poster assignment for what he thought was "just another concert." But Woodstock was anything but, and as fate would have it, Byrd misses a date with destiny. In an era where sex, drugs, and rock and roll are all the rage, he makes his usual choice of overindulging in the first two and skipping the third. Meanwhile, as the '60s culture wars escalate, Byrd gets his first taste of censorship.

Robert von Goeben: In 1969, you had been designing posters for Bill Graham and the Fillmore East for about a year, correct?

David Edward Byrd: Yes. Bill is the one who told Michael Lang and Artie Kornfeld, the producers of the 1969 Woodstock music festival, that they should contact me. I think it was Kip Cohen who originally called me; he was the general manager at the Fillmore. He said Bill told him to give me a call because they—Woodstock Ventures—had just opened. They had a place on Fifty-Seventh Street and Sixth Avenue; I remember it was like a storefront. My loft was on Seventeenth Street between Fifth and Sixth. I went over there to see them, and they told me just the basic shit, like three days of love, peace, and music. "Woodstock Music and Art Fair Presents an Aquarian Exposition in Wallkill, New York." And the dates. That's all the info I got.

RVG: And did they give you any direction at all on what they wanted?

DEB: No, they didn't; they just said, "Do it." I thought it was just another concert somewhere and not a big deal. So, given that info, I went home and thought of this painting by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, the French Academic painter. He was probably the greatest of the academic painters in the mid 1800s. He did a painting in 1856 that I thought was the perfect figurative symbol of the Aquarian Age beginning. The woman in the painting is Aquarius, the water-bearer, the source of all the water on the earth. She is, and the painting is called *La Source*. I naively believed the Age of Aquarius was being born. I also thought, given Ingres's painting was completed over a hundred years ago, that no one would consider it offensive. So I did a somewhat academic pencil drawing of her on toned Canson paper for a little inset I planned for the center of the poster among all the hearts and cupids and flowers. She was, to me, the very source of the Age of Aquarius.

RVG: During that time, the term the "Age of Aquarius" was being thrown around by everybody, from the 5th Dimension on down.

DEB: Everyone. It was part of the cultural zeitgeist.

RVG: What did that mean to you and your generation at the time, the "Age of Aquarius"?

DEB: Well, I thought it was quite airy-fairy. Everybody I knew was involved in this new age that was occurring before our eyes, the "Age of Aquarius." It seemed like so much was changing, and people were becoming tribal in a way. It was like a big tribe of cool people ready to change the world, which was rather naive and sophomoric. I was rather naive at this time, as were many of my compatriots—but *not* Bill Graham.

RVG: So, you bought into the whole thing?

DEB: Well, sure. I was living in a commune, I was in my twenties, and we were doing light shows. It was a new age where everybody seemingly embraced what we were doing. For example, a fashion designer would call for us to do lights for their fashion show. We did these elaborate fashion events with bubbles, music, strobe lights, and dancers. Then the Beatles'

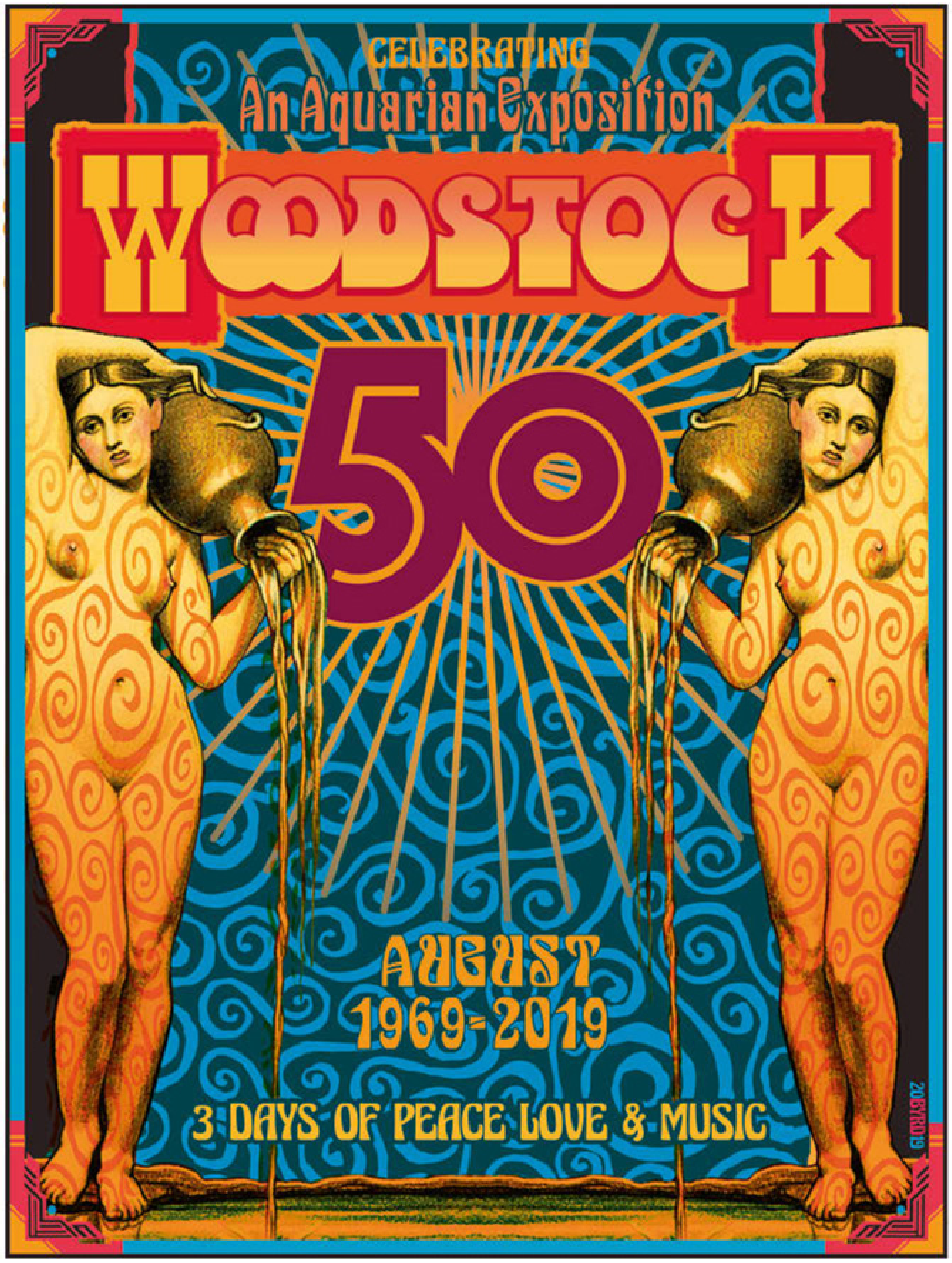
Sgt. Pepper album came out, and we newborn hippies were just insane about it. It was thrilling to be part of this whole new way of looking at life.

RVG: It's now many decades later, and it's a bit of a cliché to think about the sixties and the goal of societal change. At the time, did you think there was a chance that society was really gonna change?

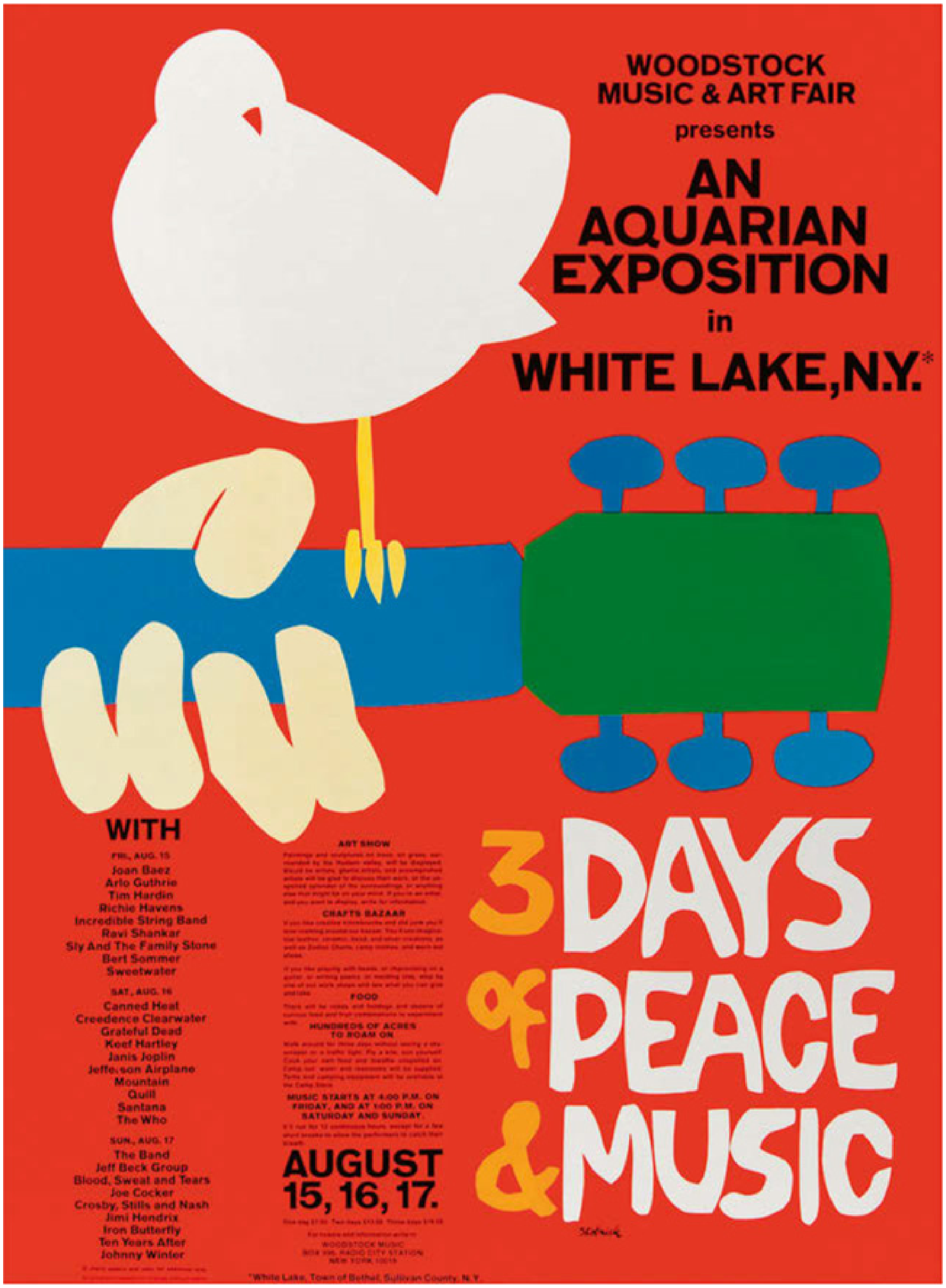
DEB: I was definitely open to it. But now I'm so jaded, god. [*laughs*] But then, I was in my twenties, and I believed that it was all happening, but on the other hand, I had to get through goddamn life. When I left art school, I never thought I would become a part of the rock world! Then, of course, playful things got hairy as time progressed. I slowly saw myself become corrupted. Speed replaced grass, among other things, as the Age of Aquarius progressed like a field of oozing blue lava, and why is it you never could get fucking high enough anymore? Everything, everywhere got kind of fucked up—and then Manson came along …

RVG: But there was a moment in time where you thought …

DEB: It was a "new age," so they told us. Ha ha! It seemed like it was being expressed, if not embraced, by everyone thanks to the mega-behemoth of the capitalist marketing machine that kept us hip to the latest hip-hugger bell bottoms. Even non-hipsters. I didn't hang with many "straight" folk, but we were doing work for some big companies like Clairol and Yardley. Actually, when I got this Woodstock music festival job, I'd just come back from Houston, where we did a giant show for Tenneco Chemicals. They were introducing this machine where you put something in it and it would be duplicated in plastic and come out the other end—yikes! To launch this concept of reproducing life as we know it in plastic, Peter created a film about the concept of this machine and Tenneco Chemicals vision of a new planet through the magic of chemicals! We did this thirty-minute film with a ten-minute animation that we created with a small group of art school friends. I created the drawings, which went to the inker and then to the painter. Peter created our own animation camera stand, through which we shot twelve drawings per second—which myself and other people had to draw and back-paint to reach the requisite ten minutes.


CELEBRATING
An Aquarian Exposition
WOODSTOCK
50
AUGUST
1969-2019
3 DAYS OF PEACE LOVE & MUSIC
20BYRD19

Byrd's 2019 design for the fiftieth anniversary of Woodstock was based on his original poster design, which was never used.


WOODSTOCK
MUSIC & ART FAIR
presents
AN AQUARIAN EXPOSITION
in
WHITE LAKE, N.Y.*
WITH
FRI., AUG. 15
Joan Baez
Arlo Guthrie
Tim Hardin
Richie Havens
Incredible String Band
Ravi Shankar
Sly And The Family Stone
Bert Sommer
Sweetwater
SAT., AUG. 16
Canned Heat
Creedence Clearwater
Grateful Dead
Keef Hartley
Janis Joplin
Jefferson Airplane
Mountain
Quill
Santana
The Who
SUN., AUG. 17
The Band
Jeff Beck Group
Blood, Sweat and Tears
Joe Cocker
Crosby, Stills and Nash
Jimi Hendrix
Iron Butterfly
Ten Years After
Johnny Winter
ART SHOW
CRAFTS BAZAAR
FOOD
HUNDREDS OF ACRES TO ROAM ON
MUSIC STARTS AT 4:00 P.M. ON FRIDAY, AND AT 1:00 P.M. ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY.
AUGUST 15, 16, 17.
WOODSTOCK MUSIC
*White Lake, Town of Bethel, Sullivan County, N.Y.
3 DAYS of PEACE & MUSIC
Skolnick

The official Woodstock poster was designed by Arnold Skolnick. In 2012, Byrd and Skolnick were featured a dual retrospective called Tale of Two Posters *at the Museum at Bethel Woods*.

RVG: So even the straight world was pulling you guys in because they wanted to latch onto this change that was happening?

DEB: Yes, yes. I suppose everything in the culture responds to big events like Woodstock, a world war or a royal abdication. We went down to Houston to present our show, of which I remember nothing, though the fashion models were always fun and adored the hippies. We flew in Tenneco's private plane. Bill Blass, the famous fashion designer, went with us with a gaggle of level two models. Here we were, all on this private plane and these big guys were playing poker and smoking cigars. I was sitting there looking out the window wondering how I ended up there. Then we got to Houston, and it was horrible. To me, Houston is a horrible place. I've been there several times and it never loses its ghastly charm. We got off the plane and it was like being under a wet blanket in hell, it was so humid. And everything there was air-conditioned, including telephone booths on the street. It was just extremely hot, humid, and ugly, and I didn't like it at all. It was no Miami Beach!

RVG: When you showed up, was it just like, "the hippies are here!" and you would walk into the conference room, and everyone would stare?

DEB: I had shoulder-length hair and wore denim overalls and a funny hat. [*laughs*]

RVG: And what was the reaction from the Houston people?

DEB: They loved us for some reason, 'cause we were part of this big show, and I think we made ten thousand dollars or something close.

RVG: Back to Woodstock. What happened when you delivered the poster design?

DEB: In fact, I left for vacation before the poster was even finished. I hired a guy who had been one of my students to fill in all the flowers in the background according to my instructions. I had a reservation to Saint Martin in the Caribbean, and I didn't have time to finish the poster. I didn't think of it as any kind of "branding" for the event, I thought of it as a souvenir of the event. These days, everybody is "branding" fucking everything and, you know, it makes you kind of crazy. But I was not branding anything. I was just creating a poster.

RVG: When they needed the poster changed, you could have done if you were in town, no?

DEB: I think they would just have had me change the type, because they tried to get in touch with me in order to do that. All we would have had to do is get the Wallkill name off the poster. But they made the mistake of printing ten thousand in advance. I don't know why they did that, but they were in a hurry, as usual. Then the Wallkill city council condemned the poster as obscene. They said they couldn't have the concert if they used this poster because it was about nudity, sex, drugs, and rock and roll, and they hated it. I had gone south on a much-needed vacation, so they called a fellow they knew named Arnold Skolnick. He created the famous bird on the guitar image. Originally it was a flute I was told, not a guitar, and the bird was on the flute. I sort of liked that idea, but the guitar is much more interesting.

RVG: Do you think your poster was part of what pushed Wallkill to kill the concert?

DEB: I think they wanted to kill it regardless. But I didn't hear this until I got back from Saint Martin. I squeezed this poster in before I went. It was a quickie job; they needed it fast.

RVG: But if you were there, and they had gone back to you and said to change it, would you have done a new design?

DEB: I would have done a new design, sure.

RVG: Let's say you didn't go to Saint Martin, and they came back to you and said, "We're getting a lot of pushback about the nakedness on the poster, we need a new poster." What direction might you have gone in?

DEB: Well, I could have gotten rid of the woman. But you know, I think the rest of the poster was already tainted. Somehow, they thought the cupids and the hearts and such referred to the drug "ecstasy" or other similar drugs. I was just trying to be arty and woodsy with the flowers, hearts, birds, a lady with a crown, and all that. These things were not obscene. But they wanted to get rid of these Woodstock festival folks, and this was part of their excuse. Then they said there could be no more than five thousand people at the site, and that kind of put the kibosh on Wallkill as a venue. In the end, maybe some of these posters appeared in New York City. The ten thousand posters they printed disappeared, and it all became very mysterious. It turns out they were in a warehouse for twenty years, or that's what I heard had happened. But at this point, much of this is purely anecdotal conjecture.

RVG: When you came back and heard all this, did you care, or did you just move on to your next job?

DEB: I was a little upset. I was hoping it would be used. But you know, it was just one of those things. The way they explained it to me was sufficient. I did think the replacement poster by Arnold Skolnick was pretty good. So I thought, *That's fine, at least it wasn't replaced by something stupid or horrible*. Skolnick was not really a poster designer, he was more of a graphic artist and publisher. He created many art books, some of which I have in my collection. His art book company was called Chameleon Books. We eventually had an exhibition together at the Bethel Woods Woodstock Museum titled *Byrd/Skolnick: A Tale of Two Posters*.

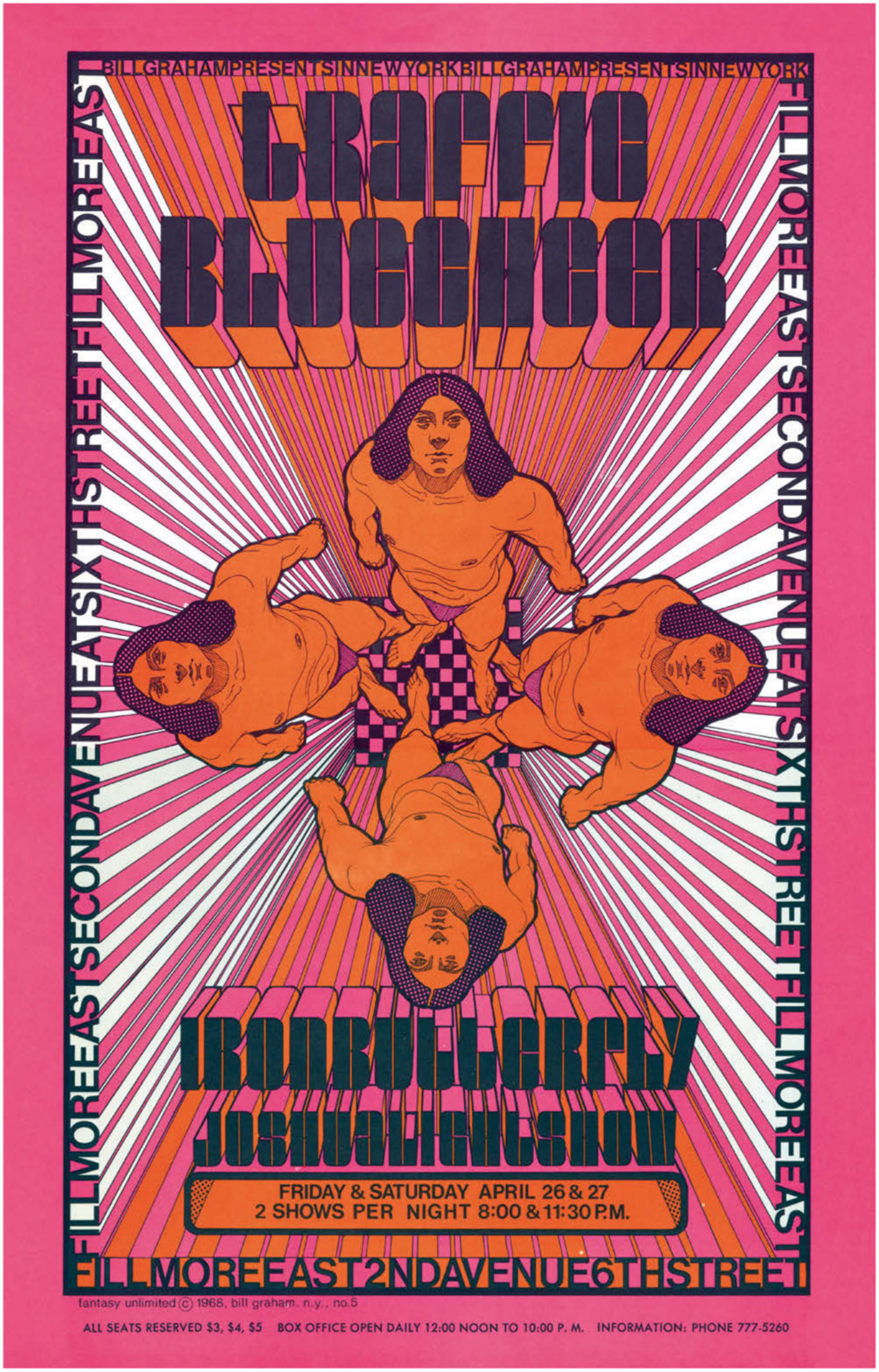
RVG: Did you end up going to the Woodstock Music and Art Fair?

DEB: I am embarrassed to reveal that I was never there. For many years, I created this stupid yarn about me being there, mainly because maybe I should have been! [*laughs*] First, I need to establish what was going on the week of August 10, 1969. As I said, I had just returned from a two-month vacation with an artist friend in the tiny town of Grand Case on the island of Saint Martin. We had just finished all those drawings for the Tenneco animation that I mentioned before, so we were completely burned out. We came back after spending two months in an apartment overlooking the pristine Simpson Bay Lagoon, which we had all to ourselves. We were the only tourists there, can you believe that? In the evening, we would sit on our little balcony drinking gin and tonics as we watched the daily Technicolor sunset. A quart of Tanqueray gin was two US dollars. Then I came back to the US to find that my Woodstock poster was unceremoniously replaced!

RVG: Yeah, bummer. What then?

DEB: Another art school pal, Noel Monk, was going to Bethel to work with Chip Monck—no relation, different spelling—to put the stage and lights together. Noel asked me to stay in his New York City apartment and then bring his girlfriend's car up to Bethel Woods for the festival. No one I knew thought that this concert would become one of the major cultural events of the twentieth century! Meanwhile, I was enjoying staying in Noel's air-conditioned pad, cooking, reading, and getting high. One night, I went out to my favorite West Village gay bar, Julius, which was a mob bar on Tenth Street. It was down the block from the Ninth Circle, an artier saloon—where I would later meet Lou Reed when I designed his album *Sally Can't Dance*. I was slightly toasted when I met this young dude who was a design student at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and he came home with me to Noel's apartment. In the end, I never did drive to Bethel Woods, which would have been useless, as every road, highway, turnpike, street, alley, and ditch was filled with revelers and their vehicles. This random guy became my new love. Jon and I would live together in Brooklyn and in Chelsea for many years. But still, I would later claim to have been at Woodstock, as I had done the original poster. It always felt like people wanted me to have been there, so I made up a stupid falsehood and kept it up for some time. But the ruse ends here! [*laughs*]

FILLMORE EAST &
BILL GRAHAM


BILLGRAHAMPRESENTSINNEWYORKBILLGRAHAMPRESENTSINNEWYORK
TRAFFIC
BLUECHEER
FILLMOREEASTSECONDAVENUEATSIXTHSTREETFILLMOREEAST
FILLMOREEASTSECONDAVENUEATSIXTHSTREETFILLMOREEAST
IRONBUTTERFLY
JOSHUALIGHTSHOW
FILLMOREEAST2NDAVENUE6THSTREET

FRIDAY & SATURDAY APRIL 26 & 27
2 SHOWS PER NIGHT 8:00 & 11:30 P.M.

fantasy unlimited © 1968, bill graham, n.y., no.5

ALL SEATS RESERVED $3, $4, $5 BOX OFFICE OPEN DAILY 12:00 NOON TO 10:00 P. M. INFORMATION: PHONE 777-5260

Byrd designed this poster for the 1968 Fillmore East concert featuring Traffic, Blue Cheer, Iron Butterfly, and the Joshua Light Show. It was Byrd's first poster for Bill Graham.

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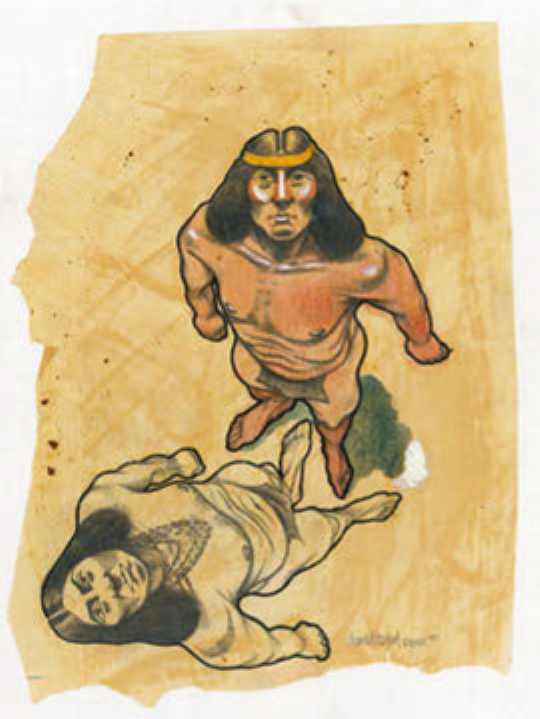
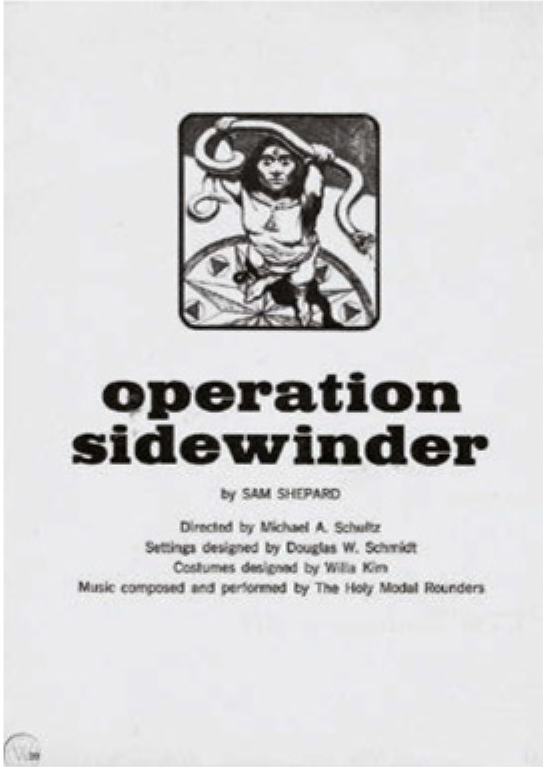


Byrd's character study was used later for the Traffic poster. Byrd never discarded his drawings and reused them in designs, often multiple times.



operation sidewinder

by SAM SHEPARD

Directed by Michael A. Schultz
Settings designed by Douglas W. Schmidt
Costumes designed by Willa Kim
Music composed and performed by The Holy Modal Rounders

Byrd's illustration was reimagined for the program of the 1970 Sam Shepard play Operation Sidewinder, *at the Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center. Byrd is fond of saying that artists should "steal from themselves."*

1968–1973

New York brings Byrd a slew of artistic assignments, but the best commissions come from a legendary patron: impresario Bill Graham. In the late ’60s, his Fillmore Auditorium emerges as the primordial soup of rock music, and Byrd becomes part of the DNA. He creates some of his most seminal work as he gets a front-row seat to music history.

Robert von Goeben: What was the very first poster you were hired to do for Bill Graham’s Fillmore East?

David Edward Byrd: Traffic/Iron Butterfly/Blue Cheer with the Joshua Light show on April 26 and 27, 1968.

RVG: Where did the idea for the imagery come from?

DEB: I try to never throw anything out, so any idea or image I reject or a client rejects goes into a folder. I found this little piece of tracing paper with a drawing of an Indigenous American. I photostatted the drawing four times so I had four characters, each looking up. Then I created a little checkerboard floor for them to stand on. All around the border is presstype spelling out the Fillmore address. I chose the title type because it’s hard to read. I don’t even remember the name of the typeface; it was the only presstype that was hard to read. I connected it to the checkerboard floor with perspective lines, which helps make it even harder to read.

RVG: Why would you choose a type that was hard to read?

DEB: This was my first poster, and everyone was saying, “Well, you can’t read the West Coast type,” so I decided I would try that.

RVG: By this point in 1968, the Fillmore West, Bill Graham’s original rock venue in San Francisco, already had an established graphic look, right?

DEB: And an established group of artists. Don’t forget that part. Wes Wilson, Rick Griffin, Mouse and Kelley, and David Singer, as well as Bill Graham’s wife, Bonnie MacLean.

RVG: Josh White from the Joshua Light Show mentioned to me that early on at the Fillmore East, they hired a bunch of artists trying to establish a look, but the artists they hired before you, in his words, did not do a very good job. Your Fillmore East style became very different, but it’s ironic that in your first poster you almost tried to emulate the West Coast.

DEB: Yeah, I was trying to be truer to the West Coast, so I chose this particular type-face. Then I presstyped the Fillmore East address all around edge, and I don’t know how I did it! I did it without fucking up! I did it very carefully, I guess. I had to ink all the perspective lines from these border letters without scratching the presstype, which can happen easily. And then I painted everything in Luma High Intensity watercolor. I used pink, orange, and black. Three colors.

RVG: You had mentioned that hot pink and hot orange were favorite colors of yours.

DEB: Well, those were the psychedelic colors of the day, too. Especially if they were close in color value. Then your eye would go back and forth, trying to choose which color to favor in your brain.

RVG: They would almost strobe?

DEB: In a way. Your eye will try to focus on one color or the other and can’t do it; your rods and cones have trouble focusing on what color it is, and it kind of jiggles and wiggles in your retina. But still, your poor brain will keep trying to select one of the two colors.

RVG: Interesting. Is that a hallmark of psychedelic colors?

DEB: Yes! It's one of the major hallmarks of psychedelic colors. I think that you can see this especially well in Victor Moscoso's West Coast posters.

RVG: And, of course, if you were stoned or tripping, that effect would be multiplied.

DEB: Yeah, of course it would! If you were really high, you just stood there and looked at it. And you went, "Ooh, ooh! I feel so cool!" [*laughs*]

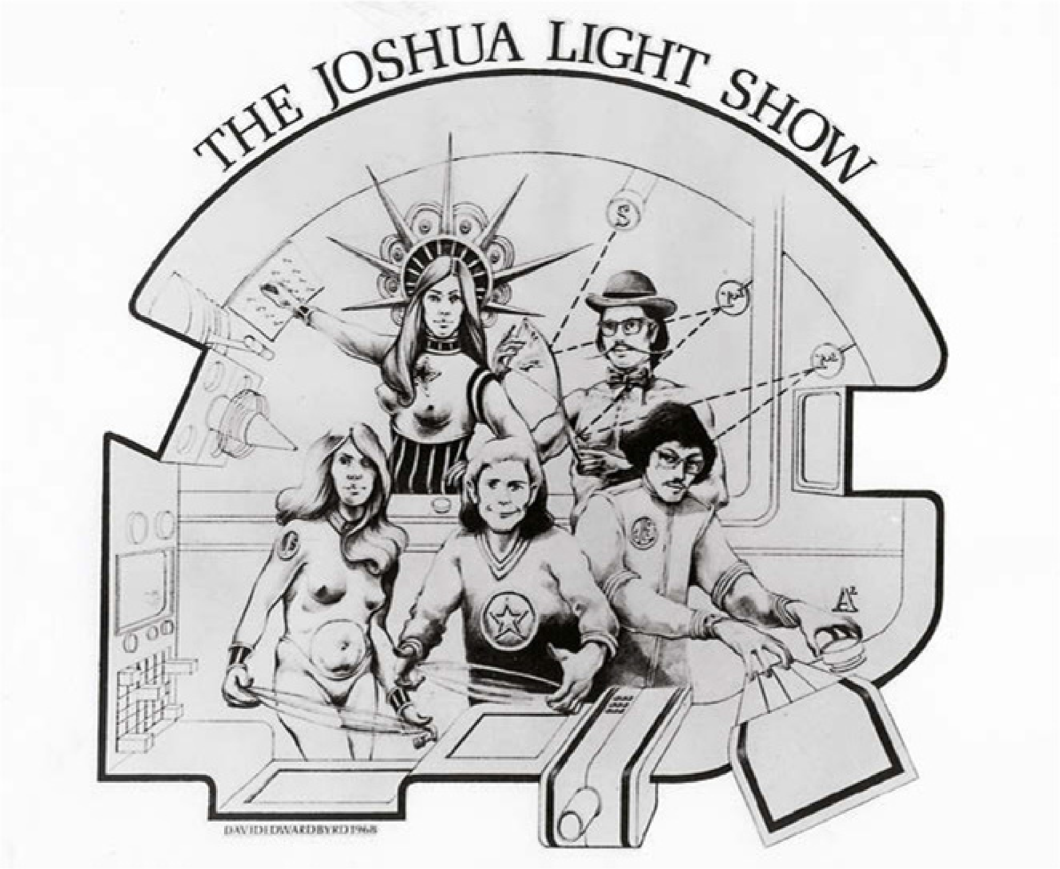
RVG: The 3D perspective on this Traffic poster is just terrific. When you were doing work like this, you've said you often found inspiration in places like reference books you collected. When you were coming up with ideas, did you just flip through printed material for inspiration?

DEB: Yes, absolutely. As far as rock was concerned, I was always trying to think of ideas because they didn't want you to just put a picture of the musician under a bunch of typography. On a Broadway poster, you often have to show an actor or actress 'cause they're the star. So that's one of the big differences. With rock, there was no basic subject matter. It was just whatever you wanted to do that was eye-catching. Later, I did an illustration for a Lincoln Center program for a Sam Shepard's play *Operation Sidewinder*, and I used the same Indigenous American character but put a snake in his hands, since that was part of the plot. I don't remember the play much at all, just that they had a swinging little band slightly offstage.

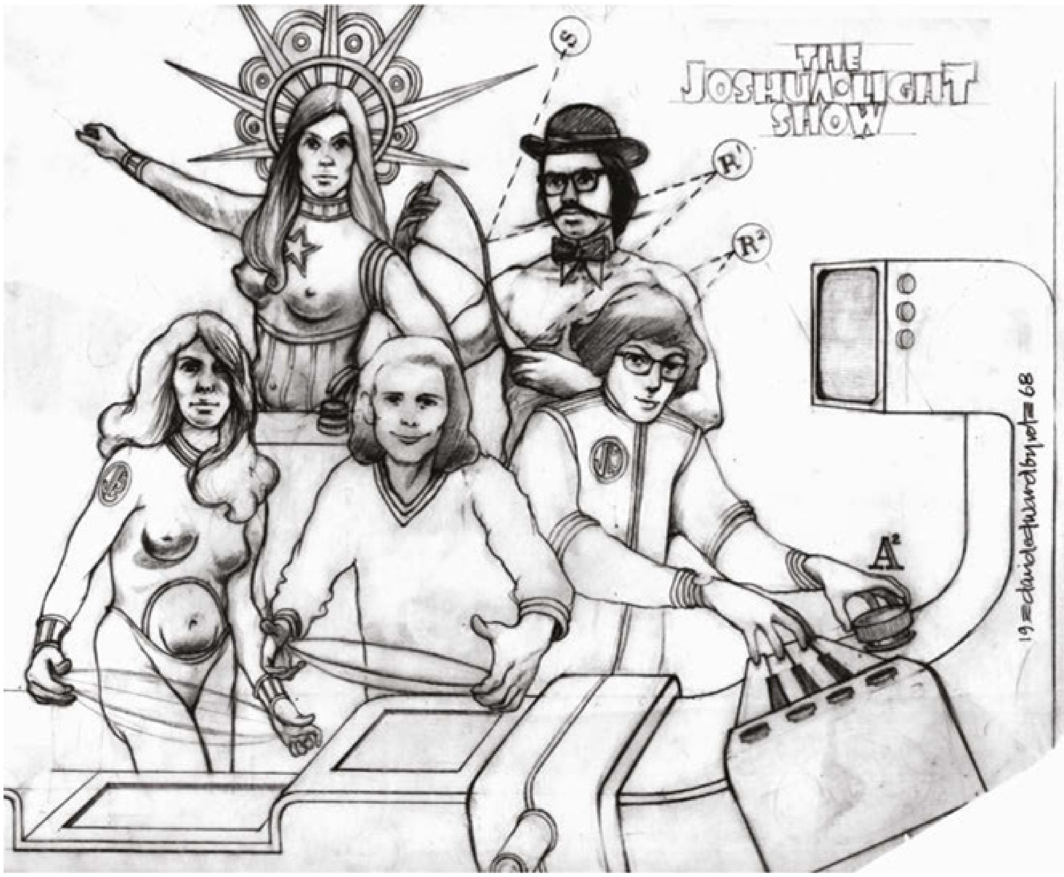
RVG: So with rock, they would give you the information and say, "Do whatever you want."

DEB: They didn't even say that. They just said, "It's Traffic, Iron Butterfly, Blue Cheer, Fillmore East, Second Avenue, 8:30 pm, at blah blah blah. I need it by Monday."

RVG: Tell me, did Bill like this poster?


THE JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW
DAVIDEDWARDBYRD1968

Byrd illustrated the Joshua Light Show, a groundbreaking visual performance troupe, which often appeared at the Fillmore East. Joshua White, the group's founder, was a classmate of Byrd's at Carnegie Tech and instrumental in bringing Byrd to Bill Graham's attention.



This concept sketch for the Joshua Light Show depicts actual light show techniques used at the time, including bowls of liquid suspended over projectors.

DEB: I never asked him. But I'm sure he did because he asked me to create more posters after that. The next gig was the Jefferson Airplane. But you have to realize, I start with a blank piece of board—frightening!—and I have to come up with an image that is striking. "Does it grab your eye from across the street?" I didn't study graphics or posters or anything like that. I didn't really know what a poster was, except I had some kind of cuckoo idea that it was rulers and India ink and such. I was now working really small—the standard window card poster is fourteen inches wide by twenty-two inches high. I came from a fine art painting background where many of my canvases were six, eight, ten feet high. When I worked on paintings with ten-foot canvases, I used big brushes, you know. But when I was down to this seemingly tiny size of fourteen by twenty-two, I thought I had to become more mechanical, using rulers, pens, ink, triangles, small brushes, etc.

RVG: Which you could do because you had the technical skills to do it, right?

DEB: Yeah.

RVG: So, if you had a blank canvas and you're on deadline, how would you start?

DEB: Well, I would usually do some pencil concepts. I would choose the one I liked, which I would then enlarge and transfer to the white board. But in this case, I remember I drew the character, then had it photostatted four times so that in the end, I could cut out and glue all four onto the checkerboard floor. Then I decided to do the type around the border, because I was thinking about A. M. Cassandre, the French poster artist I love so much, who often ran type around the border.

RVG: After you did this poster, in which you tried to bring in a little bit of the West Coast style, did you then say, "Forget that, I'm just going to do my own thing"?

DEB: I believe the next poster was the Egyptian motif one for the Jefferson Airplane. For that one, I was remembering the design class I had at Carnegie Tech—with Joshua White, whom I recently discovered was in the same class with instructor Douglas Wilson. One assignment for that class was to do modern subject matter using an ancient art form. So I thought, *I'll do an Egyptian wall painting showing an airplane coming at you with the band on the top wing*. I used that idea for this Fillmore poster. A lot of people don't realize that's an airplane, but it is. Can you see it? The biplane is coming at the viewer head-on.

RVG: I can now! As soon as you said it, I could see it!

DEB: Yeah, with the motors and the wheels and the sarcophagus as the plane body. It's a biplane, and the band is standing on the wing, with Grace

Slick as an Egyptian queen holding a guitar. The rest of the band is there in its entirety. Egyptian columns are holding up the top wing. I added a couple of pot smokers on both ends of the wings.

RVG: Is that Jack Casady on the right with the bass?

DEB: Yes. I do remember trying to do portraits of each band member.

RVG: Now this does *not* look like a Fillmore West poster. You clearly moved on from emulating the West Coast style.

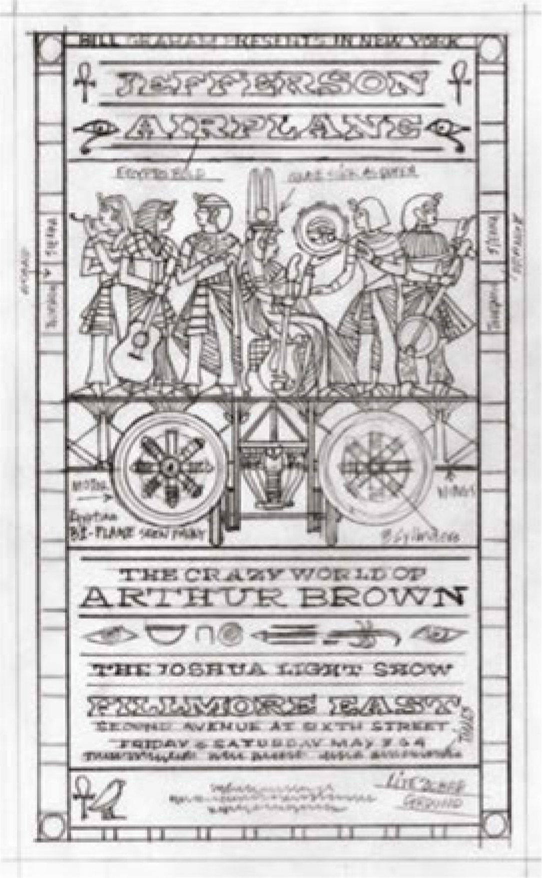
DEB: Well, I ran out of psychedelic presstype! [*laughs*] The type on the Traffic poster was the only presstype I could find that was anything like the West Coast type in its unreadability. That was my attempt at the West Coast aesthetic. Bill Graham loved that he could read my posters. At the time, I wished he could not.

RVG: Also, you came from Broadway and advertising, right?

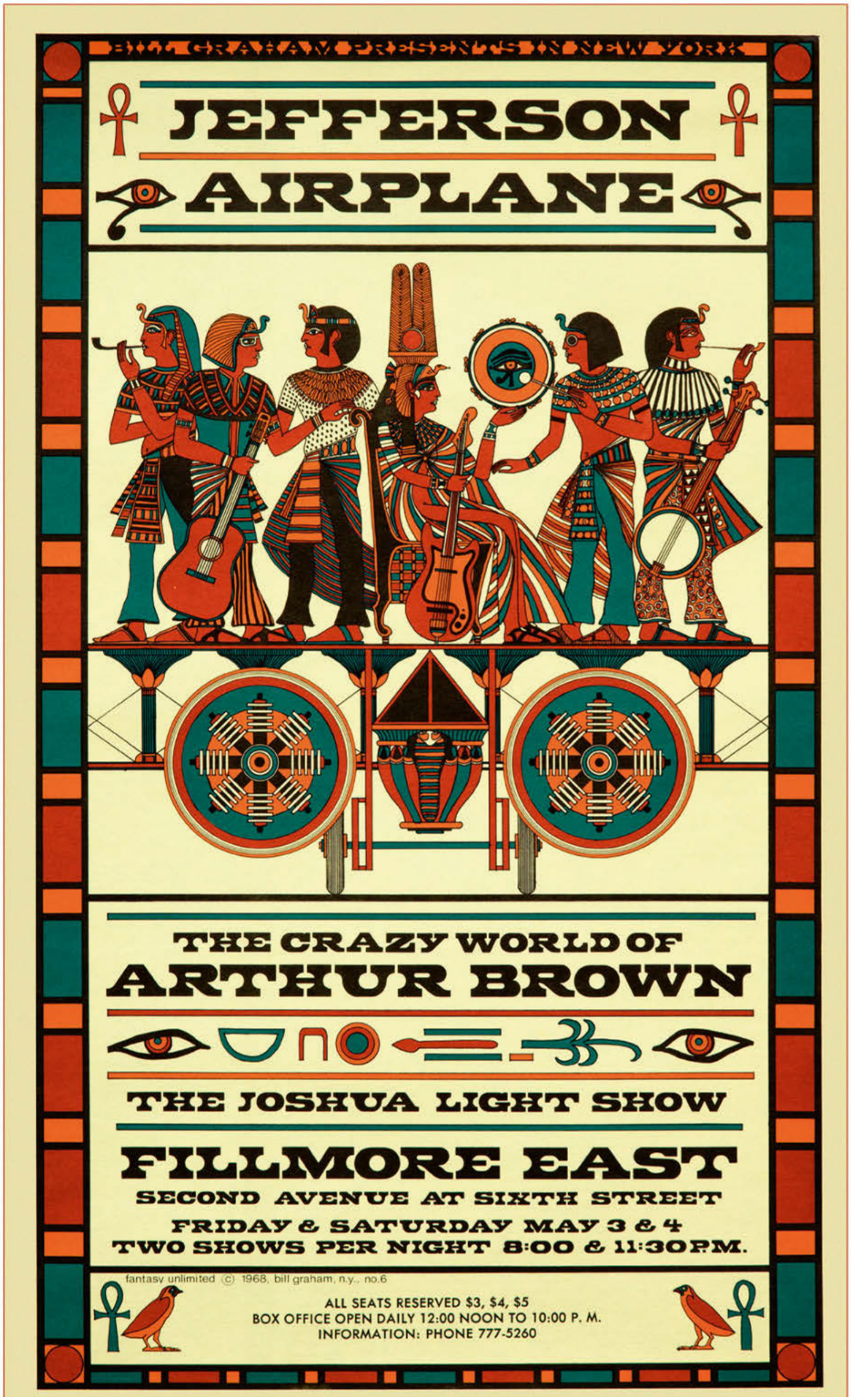
DEB: I didn't really come from there, but it was part of the ethos of New York. I am a New York kind of guy.

RVG: After you did this Jefferson Airplane poster, you did Jimi Hendrix?

DEB: The Airplane dates were May 3 and 4 of 1968, and then a week or so later came Hendrix, on May 10. As I mentioned earlier, I first created the poster using Jimi's head with electric hair on a blue-green background—my favorite color. Jimi loved the concept, but he wanted his two bandmates, Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding, to be on the poster as well. Jimi encouraged me to "just stick them where the moons are!" which somewhat bummed my head as a solution to this dilemma. Thus, I created a completely new poster with big afros merging like amoebas on an orange background, with 327 "photons" vibrating in the cosmic hair.


BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK
JEFFERSON
AIRPLANE
Egyptian
BI-PLANE
THE CRAZY WORLD OF
ARTHUR BROWN
THE JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW
FILLMORE EAST
SECOND AVENUE AT SIXTH STREET
FRIDAY & SATURDAY MAY 3 & 4

Byrd's original pencil sketch for his Jefferson Airplane poster illustrates his meticulous detail.



BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK

JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN

THE JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW

FILLMORE EAST

SECOND AVENUE AT SIXTH STREET

FRIDAY & SATURDAY MAY 3 & 4
TWO SHOWS PER NIGHT 8:00 & 11:30 P.M.

fantasy unlimited (c) 1968, bill graham, n.y., no.6

ALL SEATS RESERVED $3, $4, $5
BOX OFFICE OPEN DAILY 12:00 NOON TO 10:00 P. M.
INFORMATION: PHONE 777-5260

Byrd based his design for this 1968 Jefferson Airplane poster on a Carnegie Tech assignment, which required him to create modern subject matter using ancient art motifs. The drawing features all the Airplane members on the wing of a biplane, with a sarcophagus as the body of the plane.
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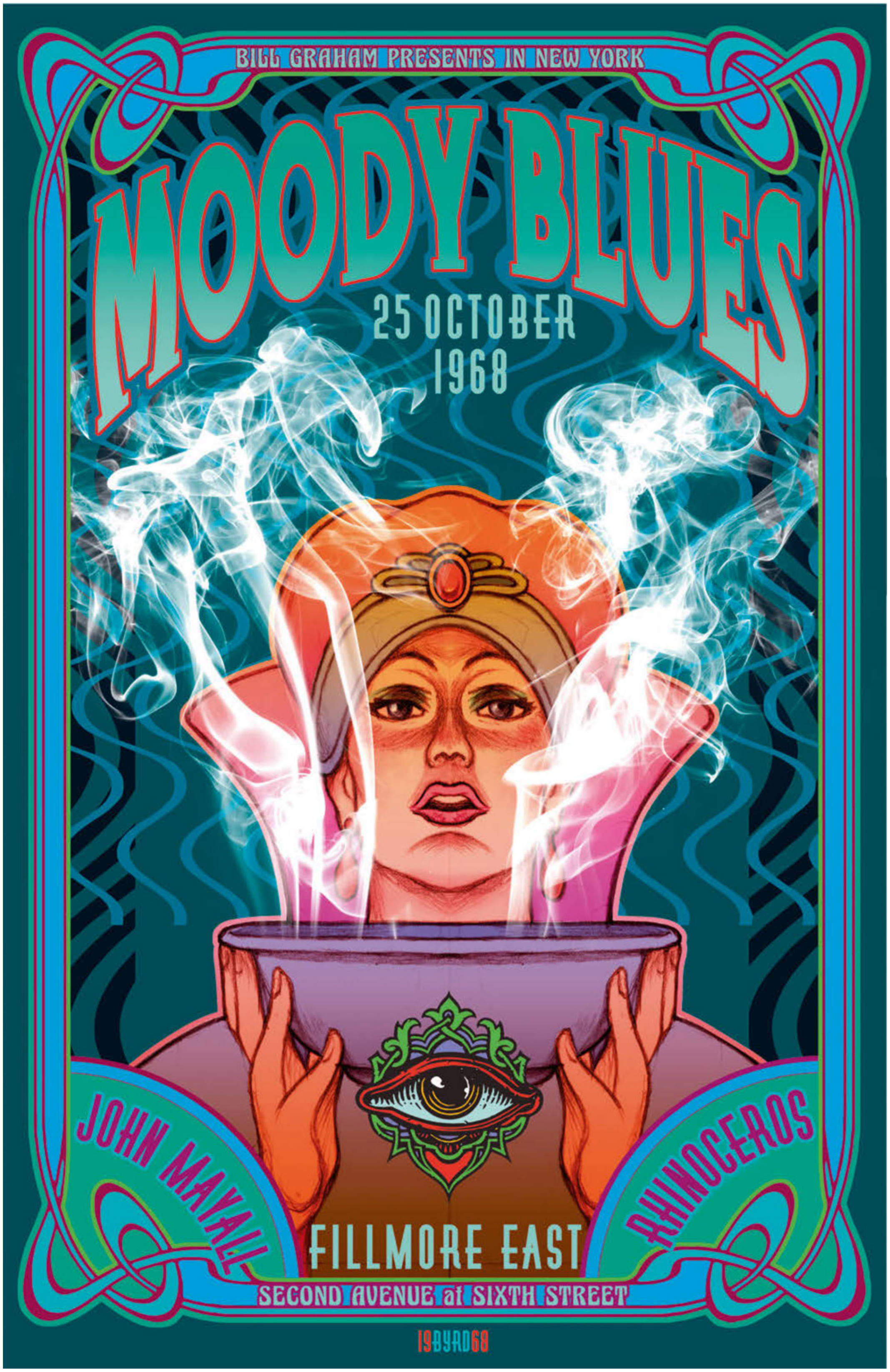
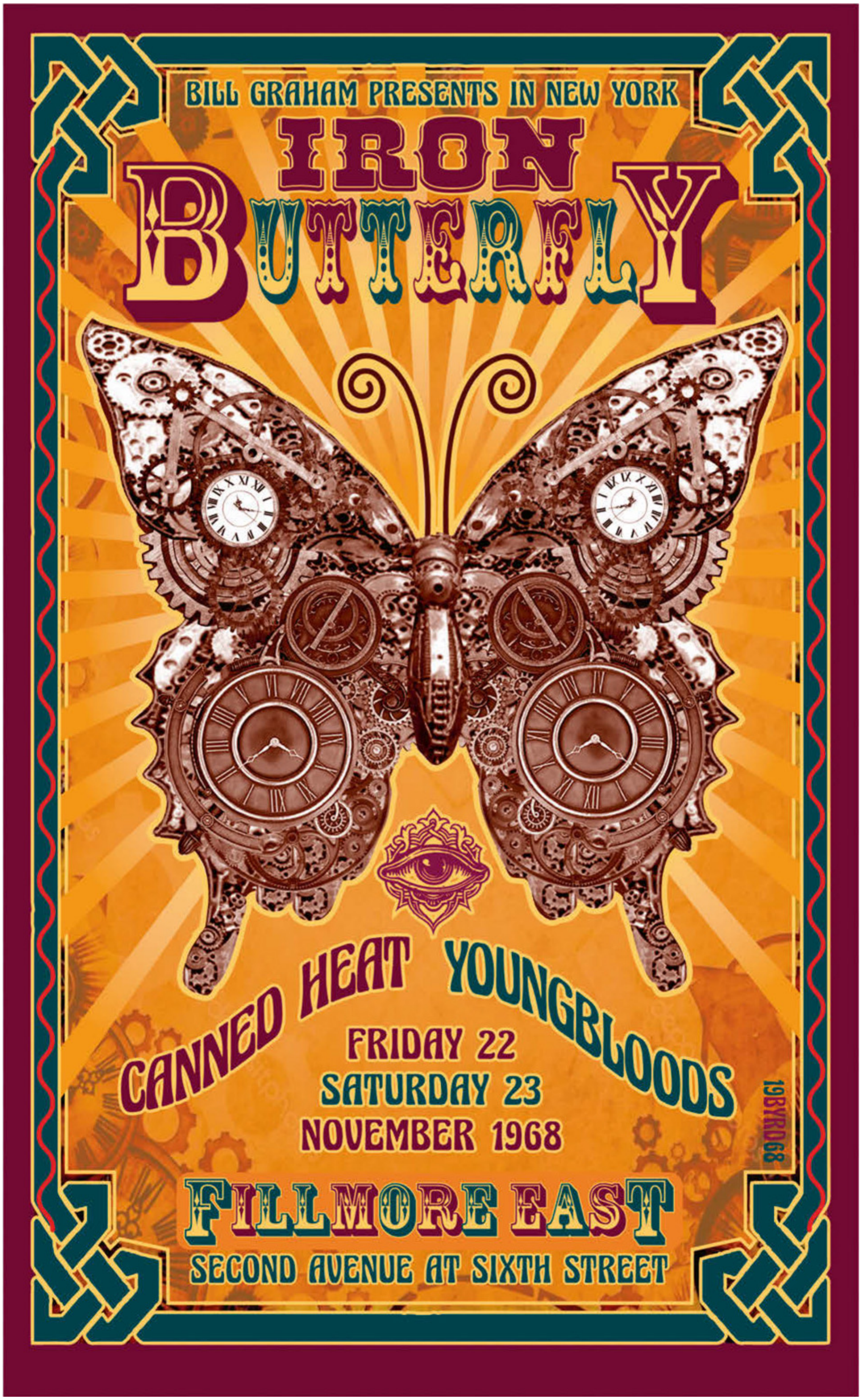

BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK
MOODY BLUES
25 OCTOBER
1968
JOHN MAYALL
RHINOCEROS
FILLMORE EAST
SECOND AVENUE at SIXTH STREET
19BYRD68

Byrd’s 2020 tribute poster commemorates the 1968 Moody Blues concert at the Fillmore East.



BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK

IRON BUTTERFLY

CANNED HEAT

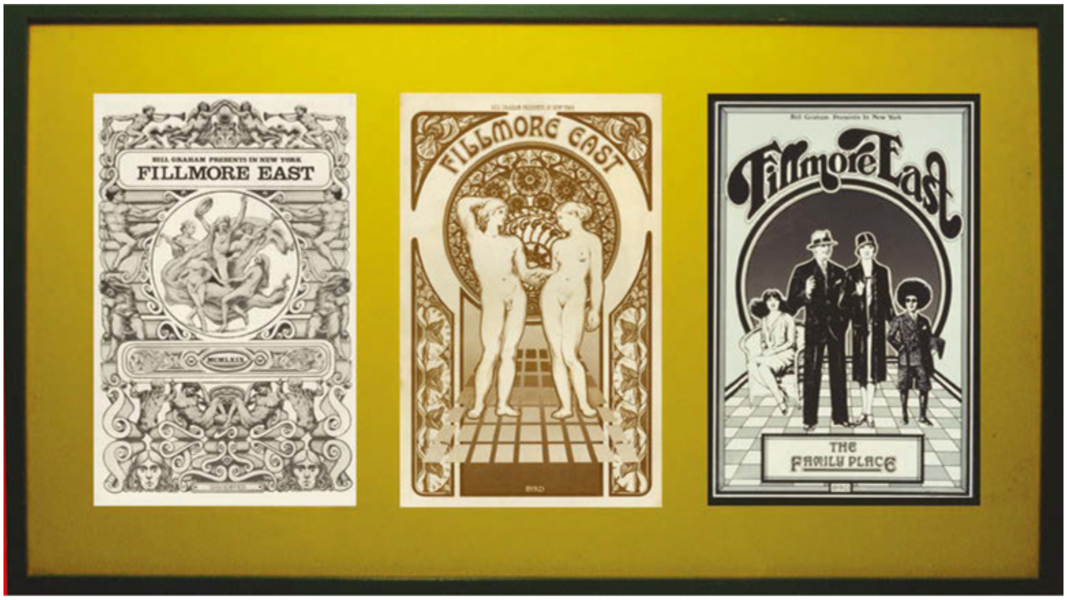
YOUNGBLOODS

FRIDAY 22
SATURDAY 23
NOVEMBER 1968

FILLMORE EAST

SECOND AVENUE AT SIXTH STREET

Byrd's 2020 tribute poster commemorates the 1968 Iron Butterfly concert at the Fillmore East.


BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK
FILLMORE EAST
MCMLXIX
FILLMORE EAST
Bill Graham Presents In New York
Fillmore East
THE FAMILY PLACE

Byrd designed a different program cover every year for the Fillmore East. Printed programs were unusual for rock shows, but Fillmore founder Bill Graham sought to elevate the concertgoing experience.

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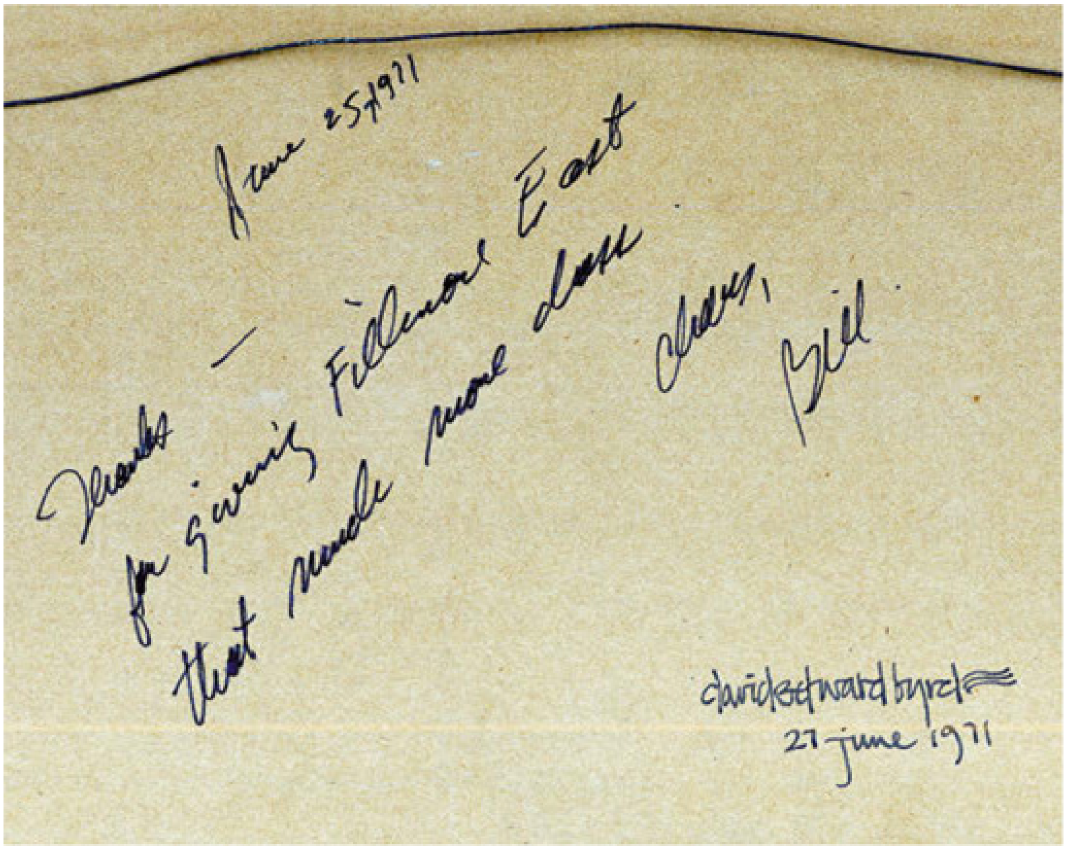


June 25 1971

Thanks — for giving Fillmore East that much more class. Cheers, Bill

davidedwardbyrd
27 june 1971

When the Fillmore East was closing in June of 1971, Bill Graham invited Byrd up to his office and presented him with a signed copy of his three Fillmore program designs. The inscription reads: "Thanks for giving Fillmore East that much more class. Cheers, Bill."

RVG: But you also did fliers, right? Kip Cohen, who was Bill Graham's VP and general manager, told me that, because this was New York and Broadway, it was important that the Fillmore East shows were professional. To them, that meant providing a program similar to a Broadway *Playbill*.

DEB: Yeah, they would produce a new program cover each year from 1969 to 1971, when the Fillmore closed. I did a new cover for each year of the venue's existence.

RVG: But there was a new program inside for every show. What was on the inside?

DEB: Every single show, yeah. Oh, what was on the inside? Well, a picture or pictures of the bands that were performing that night, plus stories about the band's history, and ads for local businesses and such.

RVG: It's a rock concert, and they handed out an actual program? Kip said the kids in the audience had never seen anything like that. They just were used to "going and standing and screaming and carrying on."

DEB: Gee, I'm just so used to it. I don't find it unusual at all. Since New York was a Broadway town, a program made the venue "legit." I never liked the first program cover I did for 1969, but, oh well, it was part of the zeitgeist. It was where my head was at the time.

RVG: It's certainly your style, no?

DEB: Yeah, yeah, okay. I'm just hard on myself. Bill did have all three covers framed for me as a closing-day present, and he signed the back.

RVG: Kip also said they sold ads, and it was actually a moneymaking proposition.

DEB: It was a real souvenir, and that's why they're so in demand with collectors now. You always see these go for hundreds and hundreds of dollars. I have a bunch of them, and I never paid any attention to them. They're stored away somewhere, and the staples have probably rusted, making them worthless. Much of the old Fillmore art is now highly collectible and sold at important auctions, like the one Jack Rennert does in New York. I did a poster for his twenty-fifth annual action, and now even *that* poster is collectible!

RVG: Let's talk about Bill Graham. He seemed to be this larger-than-life figure. What was your relationship like with Bill?

DEB: Bill was very good to his people, but you should never cross him. I was always very amenable, and he really stood up for me.

RVG: Give me an example.

DEB: Umm … I mentioned this before, but here's a small example of what a mensch he was. Bill gave me front row seats to any show I did the poster for. I was so close, I felt Jimi Hendrix's sweat, and Janis Joplin had velvet pants that I still want to have today!

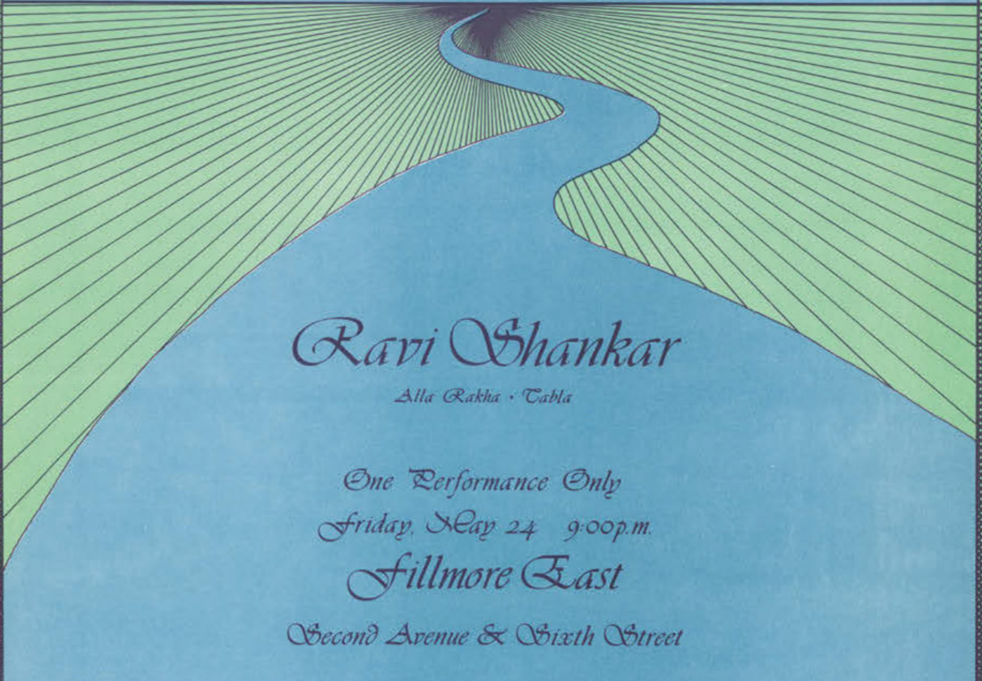
RVG: That's awesome!

DEB: Here's another Bill story: one time I asked him why the Fillmore colors were yellow and green. It was not a particularly nice yellow and not a particularly nice green. I asked him why those colors, why not hot pink and orange—at that time, hot pink and orange were big. He said, "I'll show you." And he went to his closet and took out a DeMolay jacket. DeMolay International is a Catholic boy's club named for Jacques de Molay, who was one of the Knights Templar. They helped bring him over from the Holocaust as a boy. Well, that jacket meant everything to him. That was like a treasure! And it was that exact yellow and green. I don't know if this is completely true, as many stories float around about such a dynamic personage as Bill Graham—but I stand by what he told me.

RVG: So that was the one conversation you had with Bill about color.

DEB: Yeah, we didn't have a lot of conversations about colors and art, but Bill was amazing. Somehow, in 1970 he got the Metropolitan Opera to let him bring the Who in there for a rock opera on the stage where all the great opera singers had performed. It was quite an amazing show. I did the *Tommy* at the Metropolitan Opera poster, and it was the first poster where I got paid five hundred instead of one hundred. I brought the Who poster in, I think it was a Monday. I had the weekend to do it. I brought it in, and Bill loved it, and he gave me the five hundred. He always paid me in cash. So, I put it in my pocket, and I was boppin' down Second Avenue to Eighth Street where I was gonna have lunch. And as I turned the corner on Eighth Street, two guys came up from behind, pushed me into a doorway, put a knife in my stomach, and took my money and my wallet. They started running away, and, like a jerk, I started running after them. Because that was my money for the month! I was just really upset. And then these two other guys came up and said, "We know those guys! We'll get them for you!" I started to run with them, and then *they* pushed me in a doorway and took my watch. It was my phases-of-the-moon watch, which I dearly loved. But you know, that's the way New York was back then. A lot of crazy, unhappy people in New York at that time.

BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK



Ravi Shankar

Alla Rakha · Tabla

One Performance Only

Friday, May 24 9:00 p.m.

Fillmore East

Second Avenue & Sixth Street

ALL SEATS RESERVED $3, $4, $5
BOX OFFICE OPEN DAILY 12:00 NOON TO 10:00 P.M.
INFORMATION: PHONE 777-5260

DAVIDEDWARDBYRD © 1968 BILL GRAHAM N.Y. NO.9 PHOTO-ESGRO

Byrd's design for the 1969 Ravi Shankar concert at the Fillmore East was intended to produce a quieter look, in keeping with Shankar's music.
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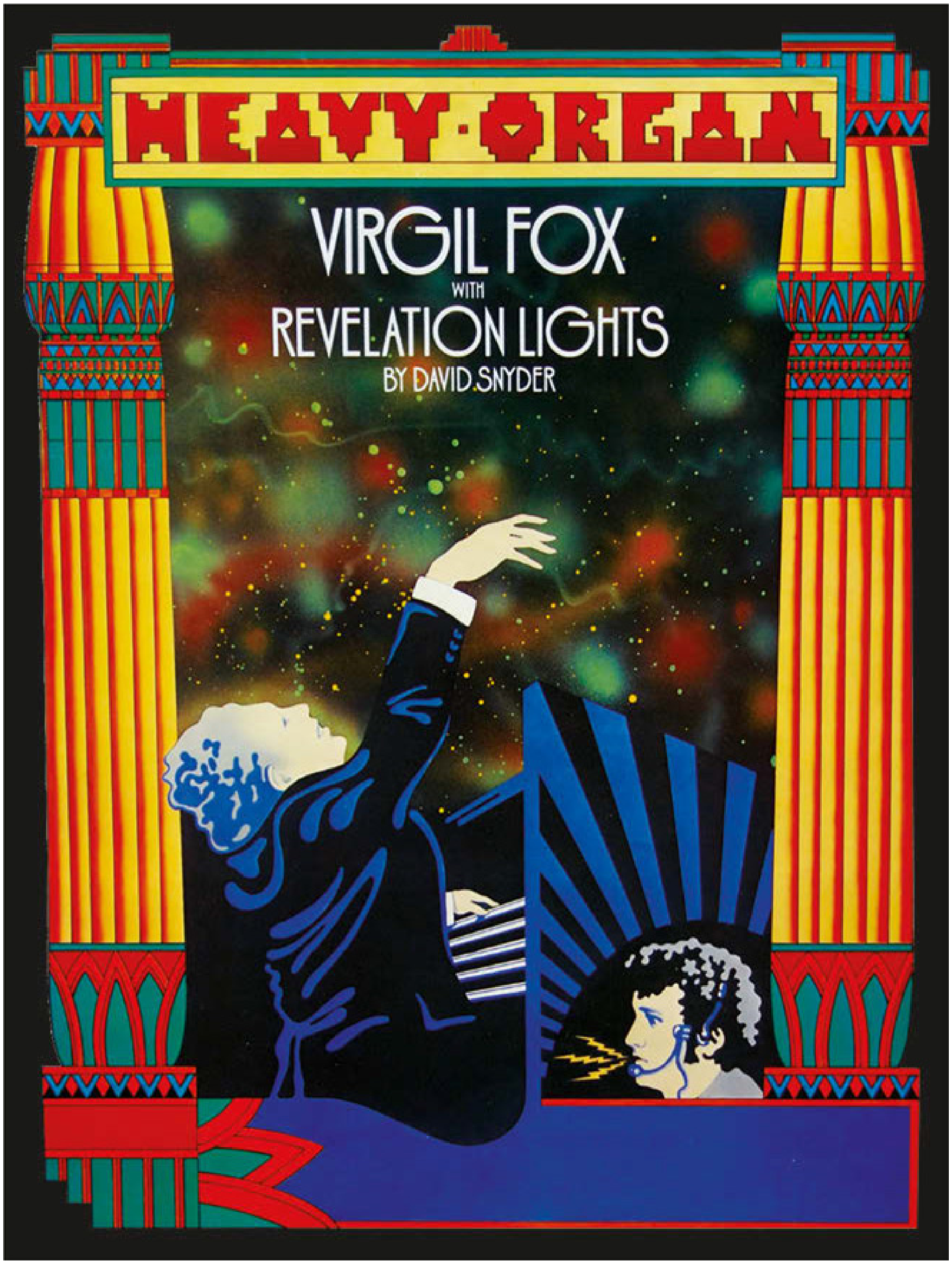
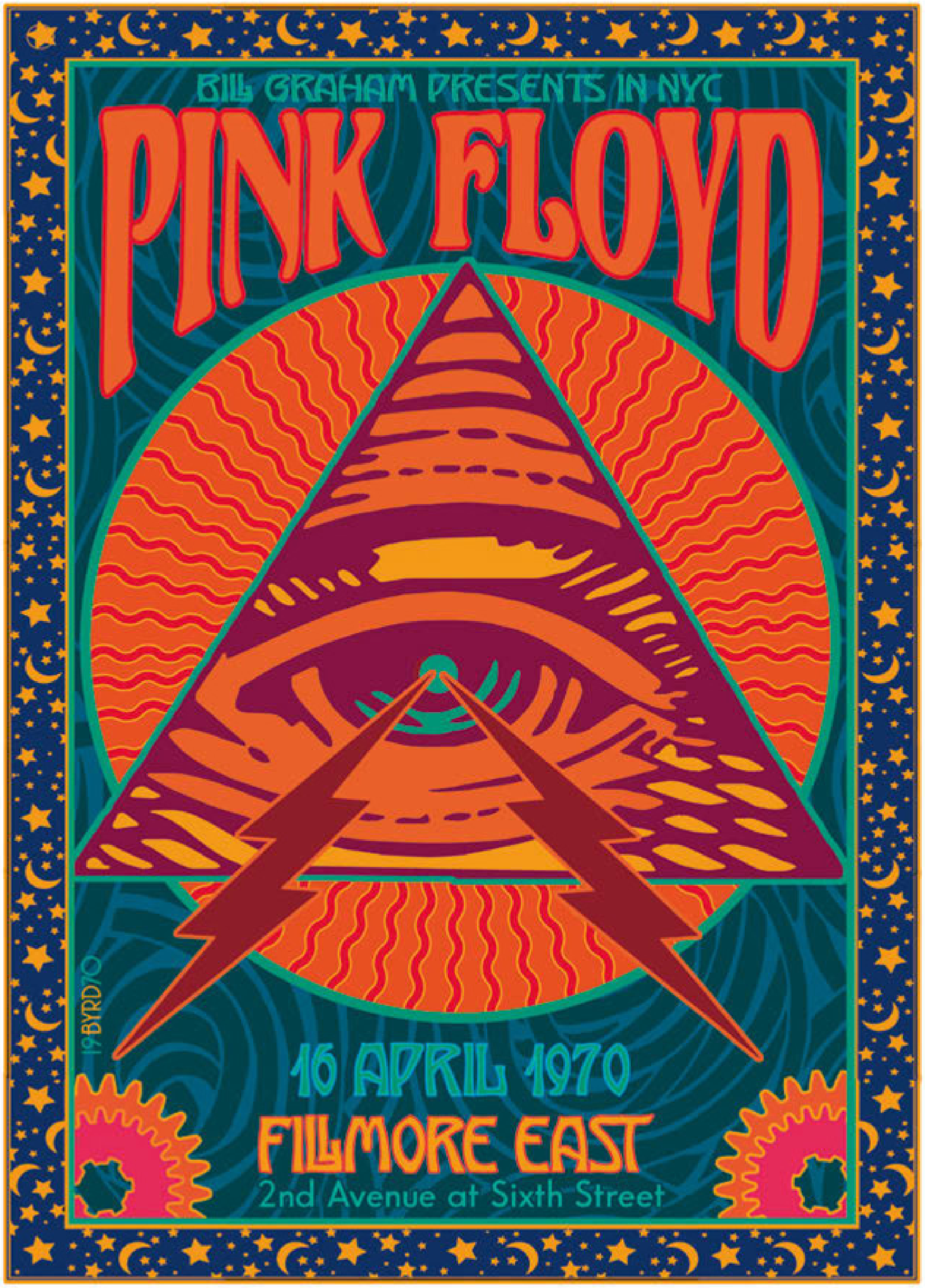

HEAVY·ORGAN
VIRGIL FOX
WITH
REVELATION LIGHTS
BY DAVID SNYDER

Byrd created this poster design for the organist Virgil Fox, who staged performances dubbed "Heavy Organ" and toured popular music venues with an accompanying light show.


BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NYC
PINK FLOYD
16 APRIL 1970
FILLMORE EAST
2nd Avenue at Sixth Street
19BYRD70

Byrd designed this tribute poster for the 1970 Fillmore East performance of Pink Floyd.

RVG: So, you're out five hundred bucks. What did you do?

DEB: I went back to the Fillmore and up to Bill's office, and I was weeping. I was just so unhappy and frustrated, and I felt so stupid. He called the police, and then he reached in a drawer and gave me five hundred dollars again.

RVG: You didn't go back expecting to get paid again, did you?

DEB: No, no, I just didn't know what to do. I had just been violated.

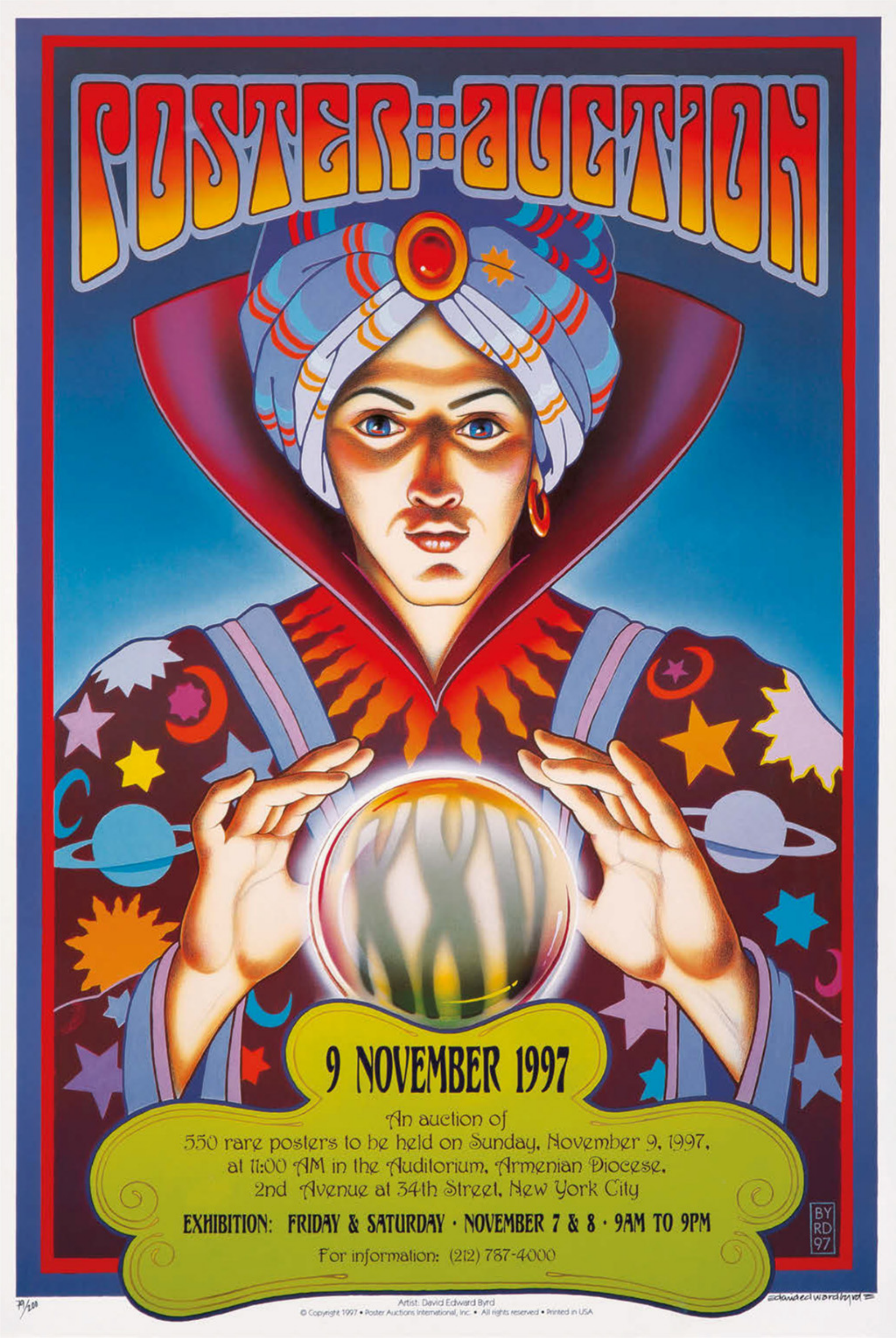
RVG: What does it say that a traumatic experience happened to you, and your first reaction was to run back to the Fillmore?

DEB: Well, it was the East Village, and those were the people I knew. In a way, it was like my home away from home. I felt very safe there.

RVG: He did seem like the kind of guy that you wanted next to you in a crisis.

DEB: I think he was, although he did have some crazy ideas. Michael Lange [cocreator of the original Woodstock Music and Art Fair] told me a story about Bill. At the festival in 1969, they had this problem about tickets. There was no gate, and people were coming to the festival that didn't have tickets, and how do you manage this? Bill Graham was there and said, "You dig a large pit all the way around your thing, and you fill it with heavy oil, and you set it on fire. And that'll keep them out, and then you make a little gate where they can come through." That was his solution!

RVG: Was he just saying that for effect?


POSTER :: AUCTION
XXV
9 NOVEMBER 1997
An auction of
550 rare posters to be held on Sunday, November 9, 1997,
at 11:00 AM in the Auditorium, Armenian Diocese,
2nd Avenue at 34th Street, New York City
EXHIBITION: FRIDAY & SATURDAY · NOVEMBER 7 & 8 · 9AM TO 9PM
For information: (212) 787-4000
BY RD 97
79/200
Artist: David Edward Byrd
© Copyright 1997 • Poster Auctions International, Inc. • All rights reserved • Printed in USA
davidedwardbyrd

In 1997, Byrd was commissioned to create a poster for the twenty-fifth anniversary poster auction held at Rennert’s Gallery in New

York City. Many of the original posters by Byrd and other artists are now highly sought after and appear in important collections and museums.

DEB: No! I think he really meant it! [*laughs*] That was the solution. He wasn't too taken by Woodstock.

RVG: But then, alas, Bill closed the Fillmore East in 1971.

DEB: I once asked Bill, "Why are you closing the Fillmore East?" And he said, "Well, you know I'm gonna tell you the truth. I can't stand one more minute of having to clean up vomit." And then he said, "The drugs of choice have changed from LSD to cheap red wine and downers. And there is a lot of vomit everywhere." And he couldn't take it anymore. I didn't expect to hear that!

RVG: You expect to hear "change in the industry." The party line I've always heard is that he thought concerts were headed to the stadiums, and small clubs were dead.

DEB: Well, that may have been part of it. How ironic that he would die the way he did, high above a stadium in a storm of electricity!

RVG: Did you get a sense he just hated "the life"?

DEB: Well, it was no longer fun, I think. Kip Cohen, the Fillmore's general manager, wrote for Bill a scathing closing statement on the concert industry.

RVG: Later, in 1973, you did a poster for the Grateful Dead. This was a Bill Graham concert after he closed the Fillmore. Compared to the original Fillmore East, Nassau Coliseum is an enormous venue.

DEB: It's an interesting story. I described it on the poster as a "swell dance concert" because Bill took all the seats out of the Coliseum, or at least a lot of them, so that there could be a dance floor.

RVG: He wanted it to be a dance concert? In the Nassau Coliseum? Did he approach you with this idea?

DEB: Yes, a dance concert with the Grateful Dead, which I always saw as a boogie band.

RVG: Did he give you any other direction besides "it's a dance concert"?

DEB: No, that's why I did the three concepts around different dances, and I let Bill choose one of the three dance sketches.

RVG: Talk a little about your thought process. Did you immediately think "old-time dancing"?

DEB: Well, I based the poster concept on a 1950s dance concert. I wrote down "Lindy Hop," "jitterbug," and "Big Apple." Then I looked them up to find out what the dances were about. I knew the Lindy Hop because I knew how to dance it! I mean, really well!

RVG: [*laughs*] Really?

DEB: I was a very good Lindy Hopper! So, I was kind of hoping for the Lindy Hop, but I understood why Bill chose the Big Apple, because it was happening in New York. Well, on Long Island, actually, but it's still the Big Apple.

RVG: Do you remember that during the seventies there was a big fifties revival, starting with *American Graffiti* and then the TV show *Happy Days* and stuff like that?

DEB: Yes.

RVG: Did any of that play into this at all?

DEB: Oh yeah. You know, it's in the air, *l'air du temps*, as the French say. You know, a lot of times, the ideas were focused on what was happening at the time. So, there was a kind of fifties revival, with drive-in movies, drive-in restaurants, and that kind of thing.

RVG: Those were your teen years, right?

DEB: Yes, yes. I went to a sock hop every Friday and Saturday night. There was a big dance every Saturday at this large auditorium on a main drag in Miami. In South Beach, actually, where all these deco hotels that were very fifties and very run down.

RVG: Did you have the bow tie, the greased hair, the whole bit?

DEB: Yeah, of course, it was important what you wore. You know, you tried to be cool. And I had a regular dance partner, Audrey Gluck, who lived near me on Palm Island. We were regulars at the Tenth Street dance, and we always drew a crowd because I would throw her over my head and through my legs and pull her back up. Audrey and I were very good dancers.

RVG: So, when Bill said, "This is gonna be a dance party," your mind went to that?

DEB: I went right there because that could have been me.

RVG: When you would show multiple art concepts to Bill Graham, how deeply would he consider them? Would he just look at them and go, "that one," or would he really discuss them and pore over the concepts?

DEB: Oh no, he would just say, "That one. Let's go." He was always in a hurry, so he didn't dwell on it. He didn't care. Posters, you could do anything! Whereas, when you did a Broadway poster, you had to go through a lot of people who were part of the production who would say, "Oh, my secretary doesn't like this." You know, with Broadway, the critiques could sometimes be ridiculous, funny, or brutal, or all of the above.

RVG: Did that drive you batty?

DEB: At first it did, but after a while, not so much. Because you came to expect it, and it made you ready to talk them out of bad concepts. Sometimes you could change their minds, sometimes not. But it was part of that thing about being in control. “You’re just a fuckin’ artist, shut up.”

RVG: But with rock posters, you had a lot more freedom?

DEB: Yes, because rock was more West Coast focused. There was no Broadway on the West Coast. My style was so different from the West Coast. To me, it seemed that I was the poor relative in the rock poster world, because the West Coast posters were just so iconic and often brilliantly designed, especially those by David Singer and Victor Moscoso.

RVG: Yours are just *different* from the West Coast rock, no?

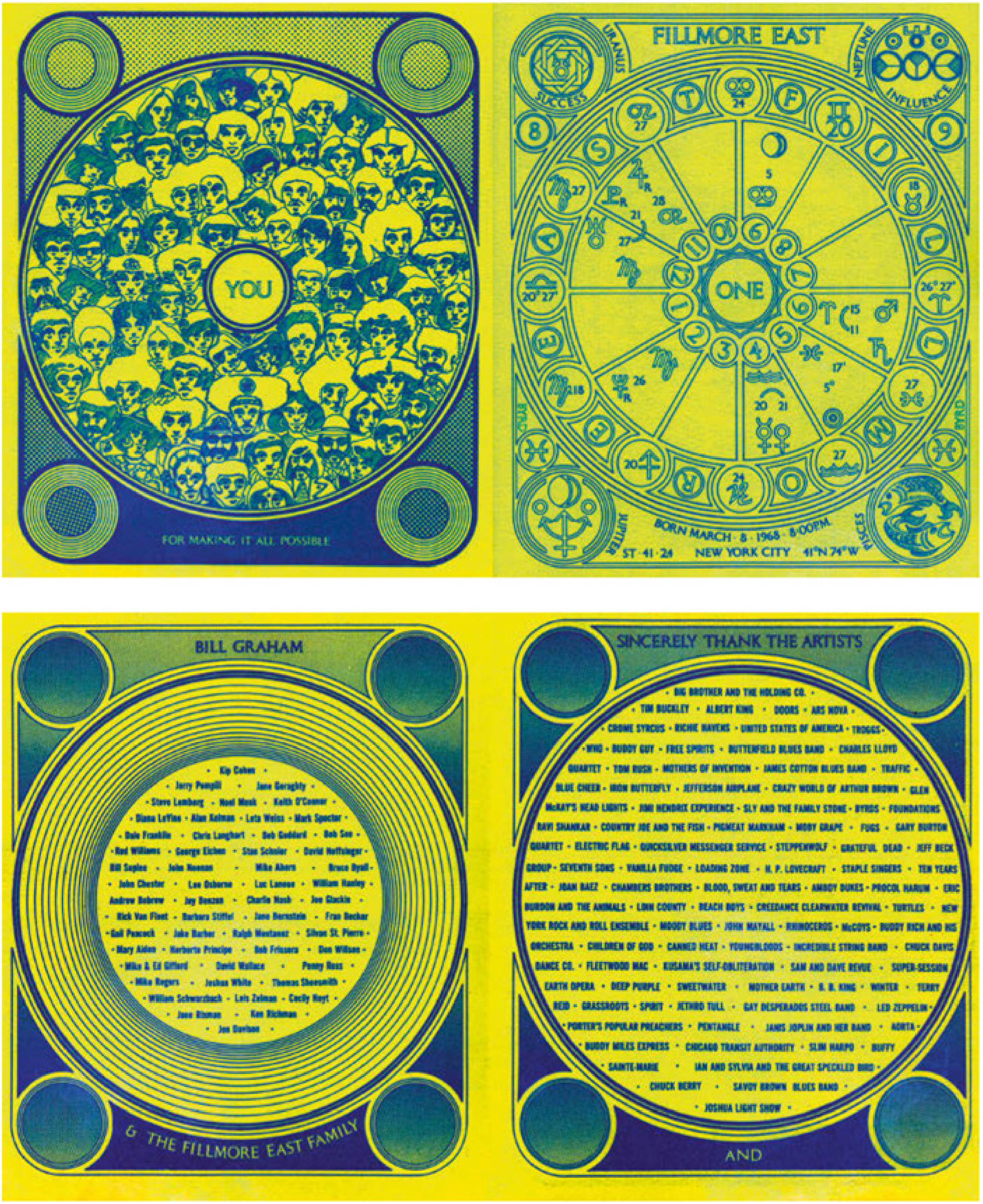
DEB: Psychedelia did not have as much influence on the commercial art of Madison Avenue and advertising art in general. The only exception to this was Milton Glaser and Push Pin Studios, whose brilliant artists created an East Coast look that was stunning! But nobody else was doing it too much on the East Coast. I was doing rock posters while I was also doing theater posters and editorial illustration and book covers for the New York market.

RVG: This was 1973. Was there still a lot of poster work at this point, or was the rock poster work starting to phase out?

DEB: I was really doing a lot more theater work. And I did a lot of shows that closed quickly, so I had a lot of posters hanging in Joe Allen Restaurant in New York. Joe Allen only hung flops on the back wall of his Broadway eatery on Forty-Sixth Street. [*laughs*] But yes, the rock work was on the wane at this time—and I was taking any work I could get from Broadway or Madison Avenue.

RVG: I always wondered why I wouldn’t recognize many of the shows on the walls of Joe Allen’s.

DEB: Yeah, that's why!


YOU
FOR MAKING IT ALL POSSIBLE
FILLMORE EAST
URANUS
NEPTUNE
SUCCESS
INFLUENCE
ONE
JUPITER
PISCES
BYRD
BORN MARCH 8 1968 8:00PM
ST 41 24 NEW YORK CITY 41°N 74°W
BILL GRAHAM
Kip Cohen • Jerry Pompili • Jane Geraghty • Steve Lemberg • Noel Monk • Keith O'Connor • Diana LeVine • Alan Kelman • Leta Weiss • Mark Spector • Dale Franklin • Chris Langhart • Bob Goddard • Bob See • Rod Williams • George Eichen • Stan Scholer • David Hoffsinger • Bill Sapios • John Noonan • Mike Ahern • Bruce Byall • John Chester • Lee Osborne • Luc Lanoue • William Hanley • Andrew Bobrow • Jay Benzan • Charlie Nash • Joe Glackin • Rick Van Fleet • Barbara Stiffel • Jane Bernstein • Fran Becker • Gail Peacock • John Barber • Ralph Montanez • Silvan St. Pierre • Mary Alden • Herberto Principe • Bob Frissora • Don Wilson • Mike & Ed Gifford • David Wallace • Penny Ross • Mike Rogers • Joshua White • Thomas Shoesmith • William Schwarzbach • Lois Zelman • Cecily Hoyt • Jane Ritman • Ken Richman • Joe Daribon
& THE FILLMORE EAST FAMILY
SINCERELY THANK THE ARTISTS
BIG BROTHER AND THE HOLDING CO. • TIM BUCKLEY • ALBERT KING • DOORS • ARS NOVA • CROME SYRCUS • RICHIE HAVENS • UNITED STATES OF AMERICA • TROGGS • WHO • BUDDY GUY • FREE SPIRITS • BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND • CHARLES LLOYD QUARTET • TOM RUSH • MOTHERS OF INVENTION • JAMES COTTON BLUES BAND • TRAFFIC • BLUE CHEER • IRON BUTTERFLY • JEFFERSON AIRPLANE • CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN • GLEN McKAY'S HEAD LIGHTS • JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE • SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE • BYRDS • FOUNDATIONS • RAVI SHANKAR • COUNTRY JOE AND THE FISH • PIGMEAT MARKHAM • MOBY GRAPE • FUGS • GARY BURTON QUARTET • ELECTRIC FLAG • QUICKSILVER MESSENGER SERVICE • STEPPENWOLF • GRATEFUL DEAD • JEFF BECK GROUP • SEVENTH SONS • VANILLA FUDGE • LOADING ZONE • H. P. LOVECRAFT • STAPLE SINGERS • TEN YEARS AFTER • JOAN BAEZ • CHAMBERS BROTHERS • BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS • AMBOY DUKES • PROCOL HARUM • ERIC BURDON AND THE ANIMALS • LINN COUNTY • BEACH BOYS • CREEDANCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL • TURTLES • NEW YORK ROCK AND ROLL ENSEMBLE • MOODY BLUES • JOHN MAYALL • RHINOCEROS • McCOYS • BUDDY RICH AND HIS ORCHESTRA • CHILDREN OF GOD • CANNED HEAT • YOUNGBLOODS • INCREDIBLE STRING BAND • CHUCK DAVIS DANCE CO. • FLEETWOOD MAC • KUSAMA'S SELF-OBLITERATION • SAM AND DAVE REVUE • SUPER-SESSION • EARTH OPERA • DEEP PURPLE • SWEETWATER • MOTHER EARTH • B. B. KING • WINTER • TERRY REID • GRASSROOTS • SPIRIT • JETHRO TULL • GAY DESPERADOS STEEL BAND • LED ZEPPELIN • PORTER'S POPULAR PREACHERS • PENTANGLE • JANIS JOPLIN AND HER BAND • AORTA • BUDDY MILES EXPRESS • CHICAGO TRANSIT AUTHORITY • SLIM HARPO • BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE • IAN AND SYLVIA AND THE GREAT SPECKLED BIRD • CHUCK BERRY • SAVOY BROWN BLUES BAND • JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW •
AND

This thank-you note was created for the Fillmore East. Byrd's design includes the astrological chart for March 8, 1968, the day the venue opened, for the location of the Fillmore East at Second Avenue near East Sixth Street in New York City. The design also included a list of Fillmore employees and the bands that had performed there.
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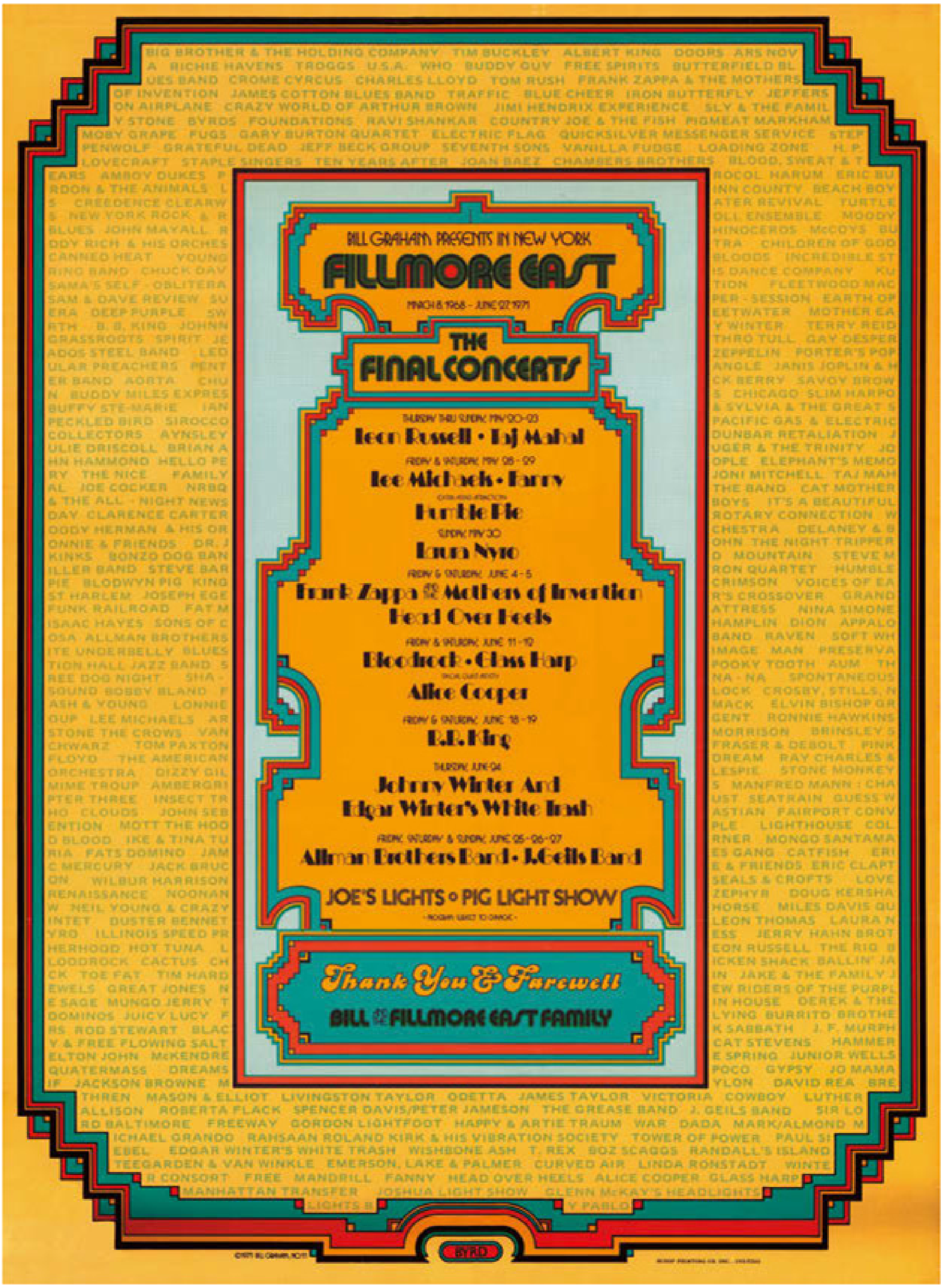
BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK
FILLMORE EAST
MARCH 8 1968 - JUNE 27 1971
THE FINAL CONCERTS
THURSDAY THRU SUNDAY, MAY 20-23
Leon Russell • Taj Mahal
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MAY 28-29
Lee Michaels • Fanny
Humble Pie
SUNDAY, MAY 30
Laura Nyro
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JUNE 4-5
Frank Zappa & the Mothers of Invention
Head Over Heels
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JUNE 11-12
Bloodrock • Glass Harp
Alice Cooper
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JUNE 18-19
B.B. King
THURSDAY, JUNE 24
Johnny Winter And
Edgar Winter's White Trash
FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY, JUNE 25-26-27
Allman Brothers Band • J. Geils Band
JOE'S LIGHTS ◦ PIG LIGHT SHOW
Thank You & Farewell
BILL & THE FILLMORE EAST FAMILY
BYRD

The poster was designed for the final concerts at the Fillmore East. Byrd, who dubbed this "the war memorial," was given bands' names to add right up to the last minute, causing him to constantly redesign the poster. It was, in Byrd's words, "A

hellacious paste-up nightmare!"
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RVG: Did you ever get any feedback from the Grateful Dead on their poster?

DEB: Frankly, I never got much feedback from anyone on anything. You know, when they said, "No changes," that meant, "Oh good, I can move on."

RVG: Do you get a lot of comments or feedback on this poster today?

DEB: Oh yeah, over time this has become much more popular.

RVG: Do you remember how much you got for this poster?

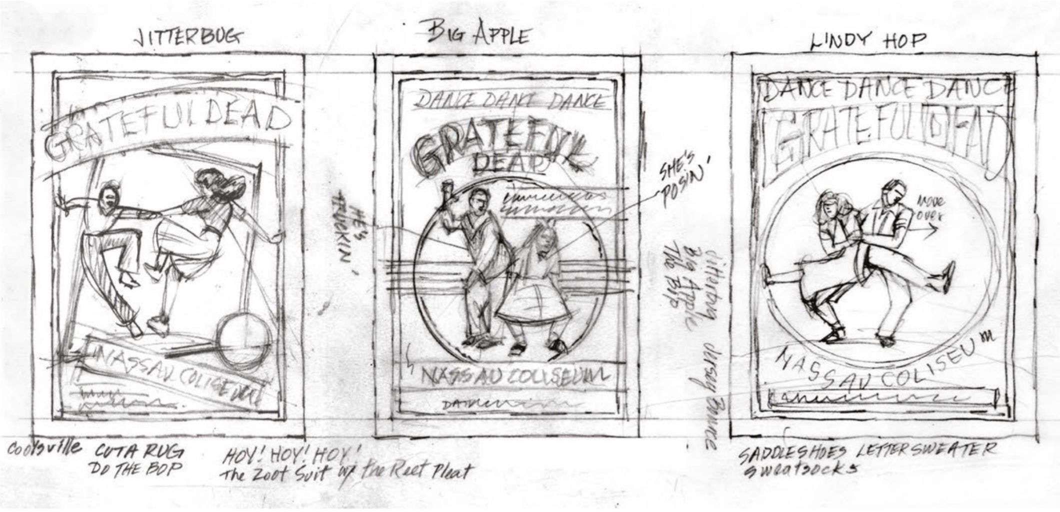
DEB: I got my five hundred dollars. And I enjoyed doing this one.

RVG: Did you use any models for the people? The woman looks like Joan Crawford.

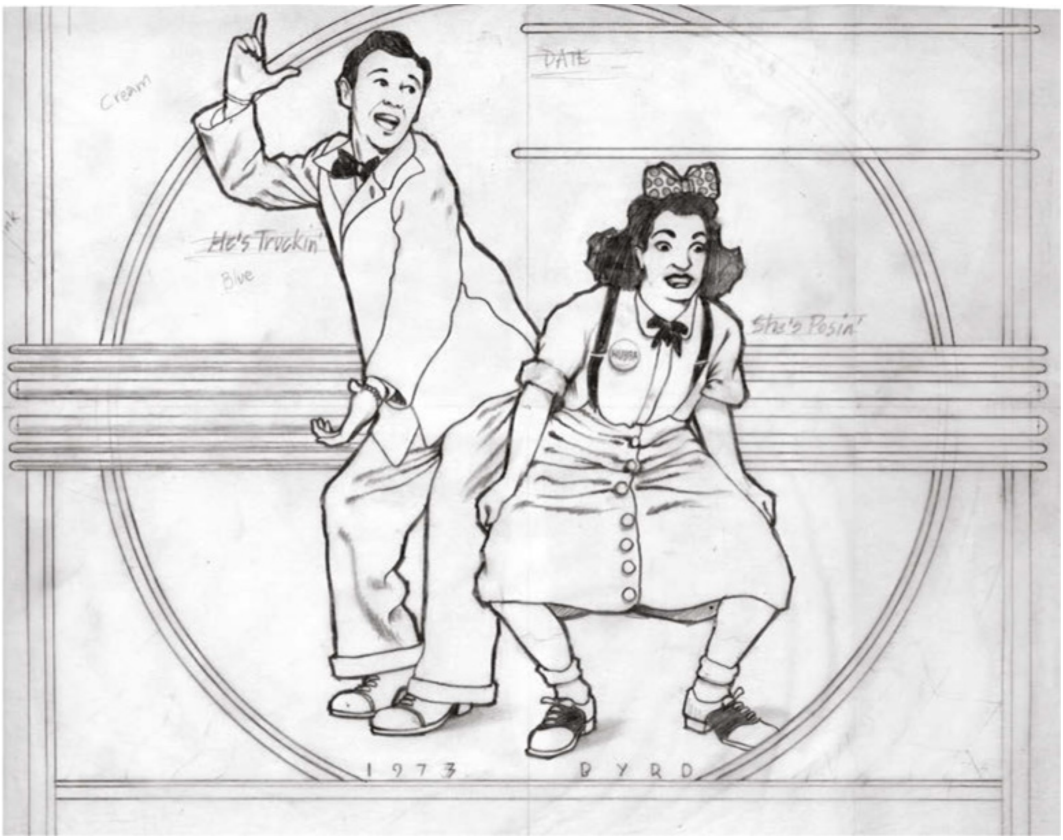
DEB: Actually, I found the photo of these two dancers in some book. It was a book about the fifties with people doing these different dances. I wish I had gone to this Grateful concert. But I remember Bill was vexed by the dance result. That's the one thing I remember most. Bill said, "I took out all those fuckin' seats, and they didn't fuckin' dance!"

RVG: Well, isn't that a thing … nobody dances in New York 'cause they're too cool?

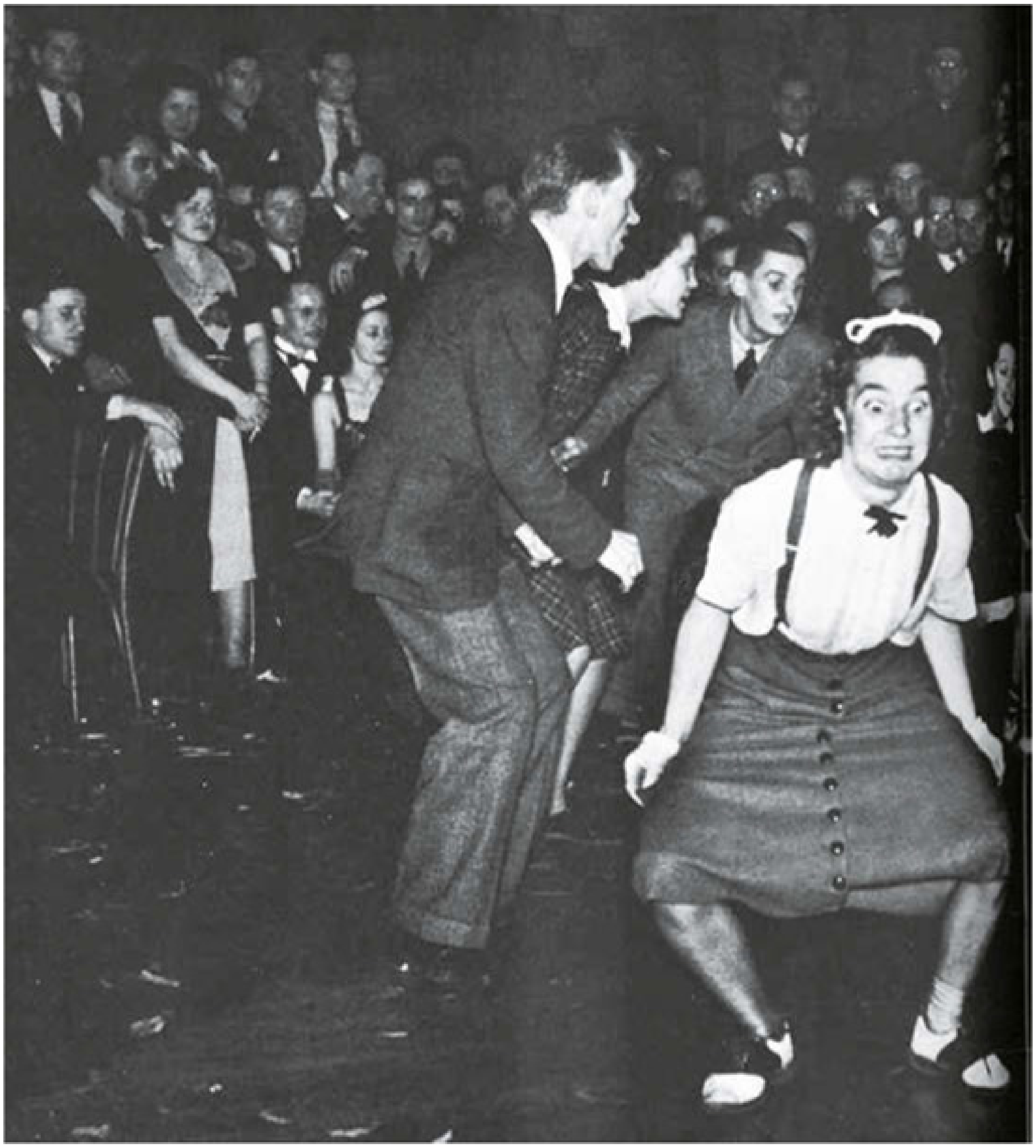
DEB: Yeah, New York in 1973 was not a dance town. Later, it was disco and dance clubs. Gotta dance, gotta dance, gotta dance!


JITTERBUG
BIG APPLE
LINDY HOP
GRATEFUL DEAD
NASSAU COLISEUM
DANCE DANCE DANCE
GRATEFUL DEAD
HE'S TRUCKIN'
SHE'S POSIN'
NASSAU COLISEUM
Jitterbug
Big Apple
The Bop
Jersey Bounce
DANCE DANCE DANC
GRATEFUL DEAD
move over
NASSAU COLISEUM
Coolsville
CUTA RUG
DO THE BOP
HOY! HOY! HOY!
The Zoot Suit w/ the Reet Pleat
SADDLESHOES LETTERSWEATER
sweatsocks

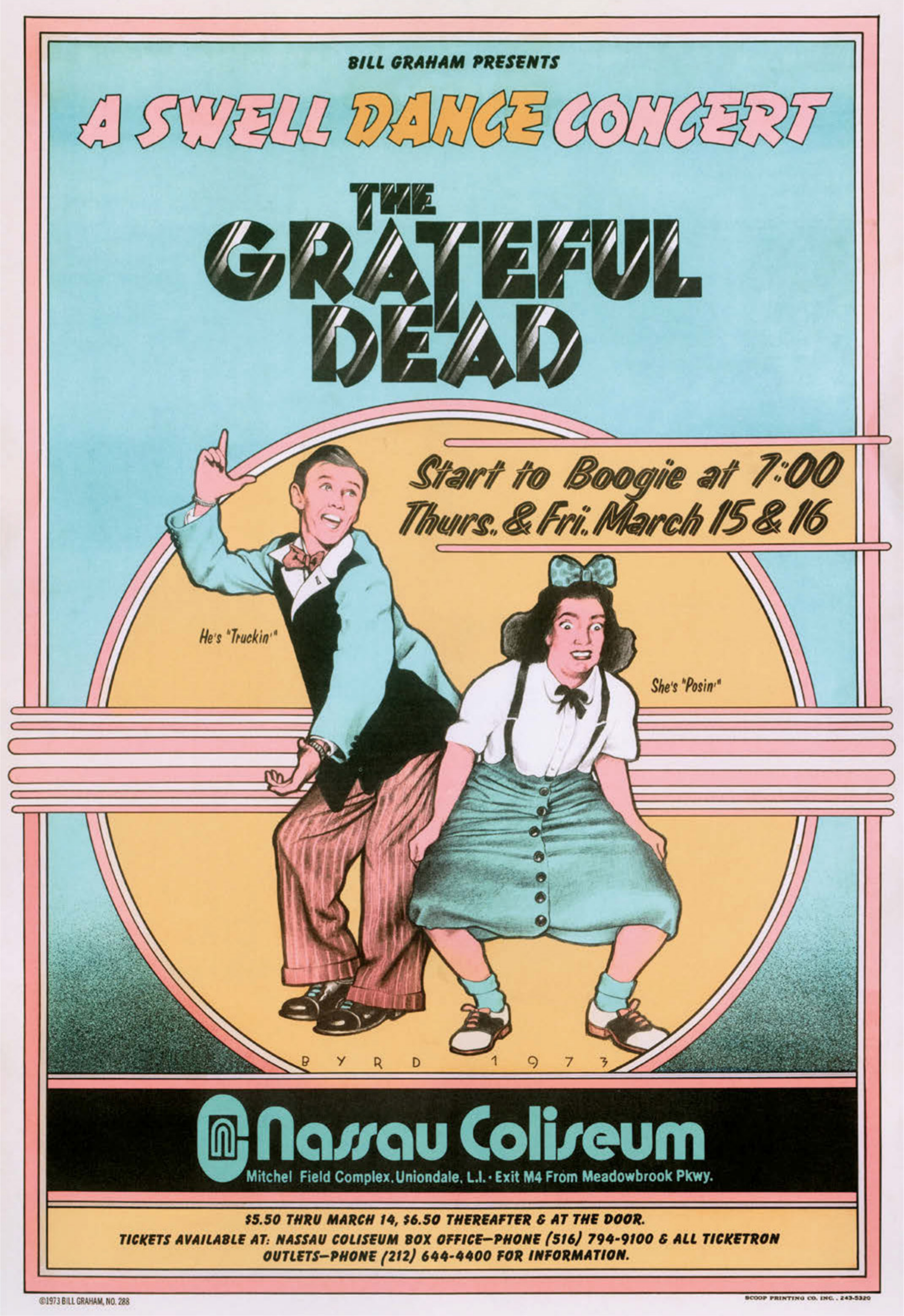
These sketches for Byrd's 1973 Grateful Dead poster incorporated famous dances Byrd remembered from his teenage years, as promoter Bill Graham wanted this to be a dance concert.


Cream
DATE
~~He's Truckin'~~
Blue
She's Posin'
1973
BYRD

Graham ended up choosing the dance known as the Big Apple, since the concert was happening in New York. "Truckin'" and *"posin'" are two moves in the dance.*



This photograph served as Byrd's model of the Big Apple dance.



BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS

A SWELL DANCE CONCERT

THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Start to Boogie at 7:00
Thurs. & Fri. March 15 & 16

He's "Truckin'"

She's "Posin'"

BYRD 1973

Nassau Coliseum
Mitchel Field Complex. Uniondale, L.I. · Exit M4 From Meadowbrook Pkwy.

$5.50 THRU MARCH 14, $6.50 THEREAFTER & AT THE DOOR.
TICKETS AVAILABLE AT: NASSAU COLISEUM BOX OFFICE—PHONE (516) 794-9100 & ALL TICKETRON OUTLETS—PHONE (212) 644-4400 FOR INFORMATION.

©1973 BILL GRAHAM, NO. 288

SCOOP PRINTING CO. INC., 243-5320

Final poster for the Grateful Dead at Nassau Coliseum, 1973

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THE WHO

1960–2017

A simple poster in 1969 for the Fillmore begins three decades of designs for the Who. Bill Graham, always feeding Byrd the choice assignments, brings him on board for important posters for the rock opera *Tommy*, including their groundbreaking performance at the Metropolitan Opera House. It's the early '70s, and Byrd is a creative juggernaut. Stealing from himself, he creates a graphic feedback loop that reverberates in some odd corners, including pornography.

Robert von Goeben: In 1969, you started what would be decades of work for the Who. Did you like the band?

David Edward Byrd: Oh yeah, very much. We listened to their music at the commune almost every night in the living room of our fifteen-room farmhouse back when we first started Fantasy Unlimited. Also, we all thought Keith Moon was the best drummer alive, with Ringo Starr in second place. And then there was Roger Daltrey, and he was a very sexy, very athletic man with a very good voice!

RVG: Your first work was a poster for a performance of *Tommy* at the Fillmore East in 1969. Talk about that one.

DEB: Well, let's see. It was one of their early performances of *Tommy* in the States, the album had only been out a few months. But from a creative standpoint, I never thought this was a successful poster, because the thing you read first is "Joshua Light Show." "The Who" and "Tommy" are an unfortunate second read because of the way I chose the type, which was hand-lettered. Everyone on the Fillmore East staff said, “Oh, it’s a poster for the Joshua Light Show.” That sort of queered the poster for me from that time forward. Josh White, of course, loved it, ’cause it made him stand out. But I have to say, looking at it now, his name doesn’t stand out as much as it seemed to at the time. Oh well. Such are the vicissitudes of rock art.

RVG: That’s ironic because, in speaking to Josh recently, he said he always thought of himself as *supporting* the act, not *being* the act.

DEB: Josh is a very humble, unassuming guy, but he’s also a visionary talent—in my opinion he basically created what we call the light show. I adore him. Later, I had to lecture on what a poster is, and, of course, it is a marriage of image *and* type. I now feel that, in the case of this first *Tommy* poster, the marriage is a little shaky.

RVG: Do you think someone pointed this out to you, and it just got stuck in your craw?

DEB: No, no, many people mentioned it at the time. ’Cause when you look at the original, just the Joshua Light Show jumps out, unfortunately.

RVG: It’s funny, the poster says: “Presented by special arrangement with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.” You were going for that super-British feel, right?

DEB: Yes, that is what I was doing with this red, white, and blue British flag motif. And “Her Majesty,” well, la-di-dah! I didn’t remember that line was in there! Rule Britannia!

RVG: Did you associate the band with being super British?

DEB: Yeah, absolutely.

RVG: You saw the show, right?

DEB: Oh yeah, I was in the front row at the Fillmore East.

RVG: You know, there are a lot of tales of what the Who was like in concert in their prime. What's your recollection of it?

DEB: Well, everybody was just stunned! It was pretty terrific. That's how they ended up at the Metropolitan Opera. No one but operatic performers like [Maria] Callas, [Plácido] Domingo, and [Enrico] Caruso had ever appeared on the hallowed boards of the Metropolitan Opera.

RVG: We'll talk about the Met in a second, but when you first saw them, tell me what you remember about the show. Was it loud, bombastic, all the things that they say?

DEB: Yes, it was, and they just tore their instruments up. They were so extraordinary! They were at the top of their form. The crowd was exalted, as was this hippie dude!

RVG: Had you ever seen that before?

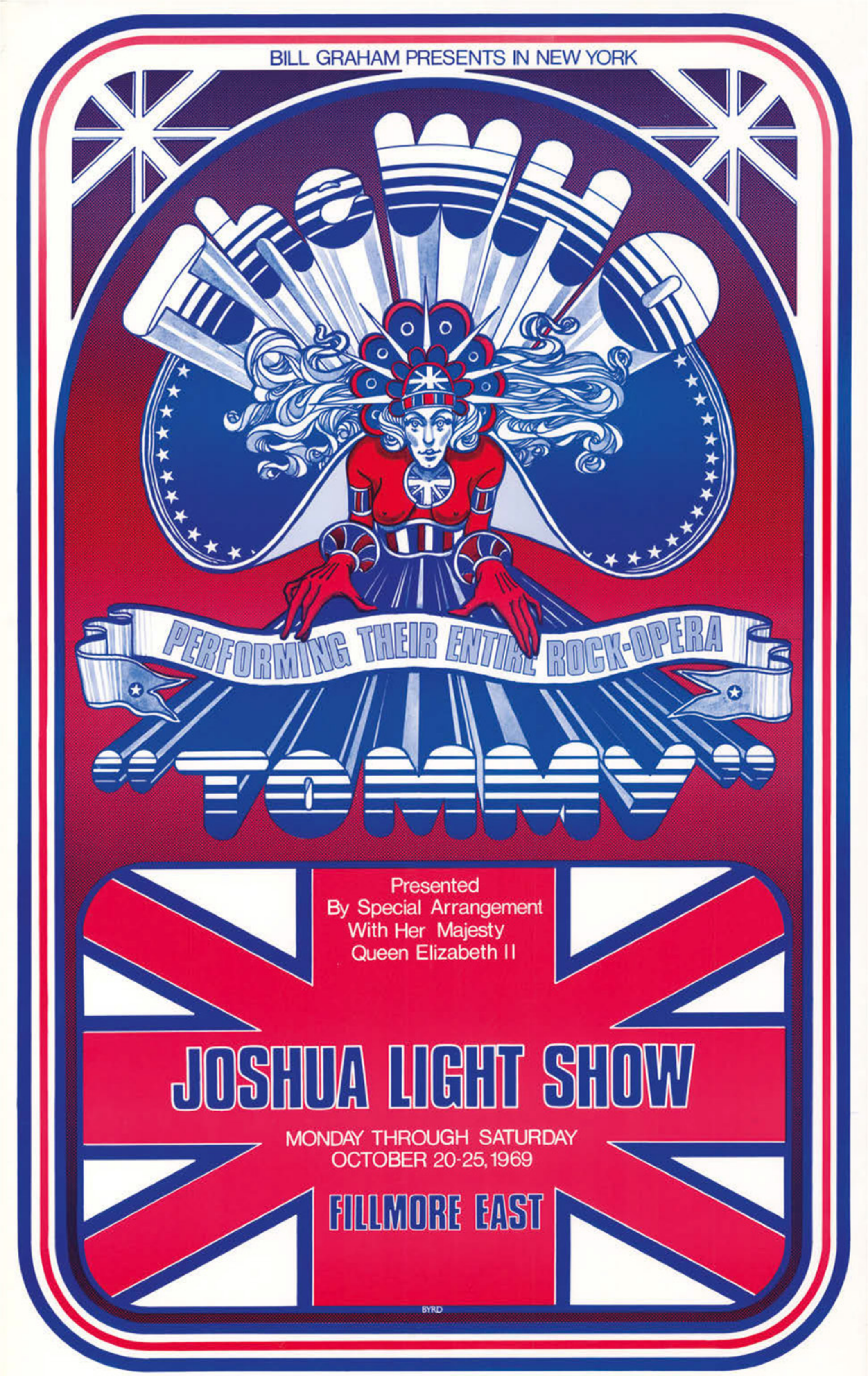
DEB: Jimi beat up his guitar at the end of his performance at the Fillmore East. I'd never seen that, everyone was screaming and stomping their feet while he did it! It was a very effective moment.

RVG: The Who took it to the next level, no?

DEB: They were simply mad; it was stratospheric insanity. And they had huge speakers, you know; they were as tall as me, like six feet high! [*laughs*] They almost went broke due to the cost of replacing their instruments—not to forget ancillary damage to their venues, according to their manager.

RVG: Was it Bill Graham's concept to take *Tommy* and the Who into the Metropolitan Opera House? Did you think he could pull it off?

DEB: Yes. He's the only one who could have done it. He had a way with people he was dealing with financially, a way to get them to say yes to some of his more outrageous requests. For the Who at the Met, Bill worked with Sol Hurok. He was a legendary classical music impresario who brought Marian Anderson to the Lincoln Memorial when the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow her to sing at Constitution Hall because she was Black. He also represented many of the great classical artists of the day, like Vladimir Ashkenazy, Van Cliburn, Isadora Duncan, and Arthur Rubinstein. In my estimation, this show became the biggest theatrical coup of Bill’s career. He was a very charming man, aside from his often-gruff appearance, and a world-class negotiator.



BILL GRAHAM PRESENTS IN NEW YORK

THE WHO

PERFORMING THEIR ENTIRE ROCK-OPERA

"TOMMY"

Presented
By Special Arrangement
With Her Majesty
Queen Elizabeth II

JOSHUA LIGHT SHOW

MONDAY THROUGH SATURDAY
OCTOBER 20-25, 1969

FILLMORE EAST

BYRD

©1969 BILL GRAHAM, NO.10

Distributed by TRITON GALLERY, INC., 323 West 45th Street, New York City, N. Y. 10036

This poster, created for the 1969 performance of the rock opera Tommy *by the Who at the Fillmore East, was completely inked by hand. Byrd was always concerned that "Joshua Light Show" registered more than "The Who," even though the type used for the band was larger.*

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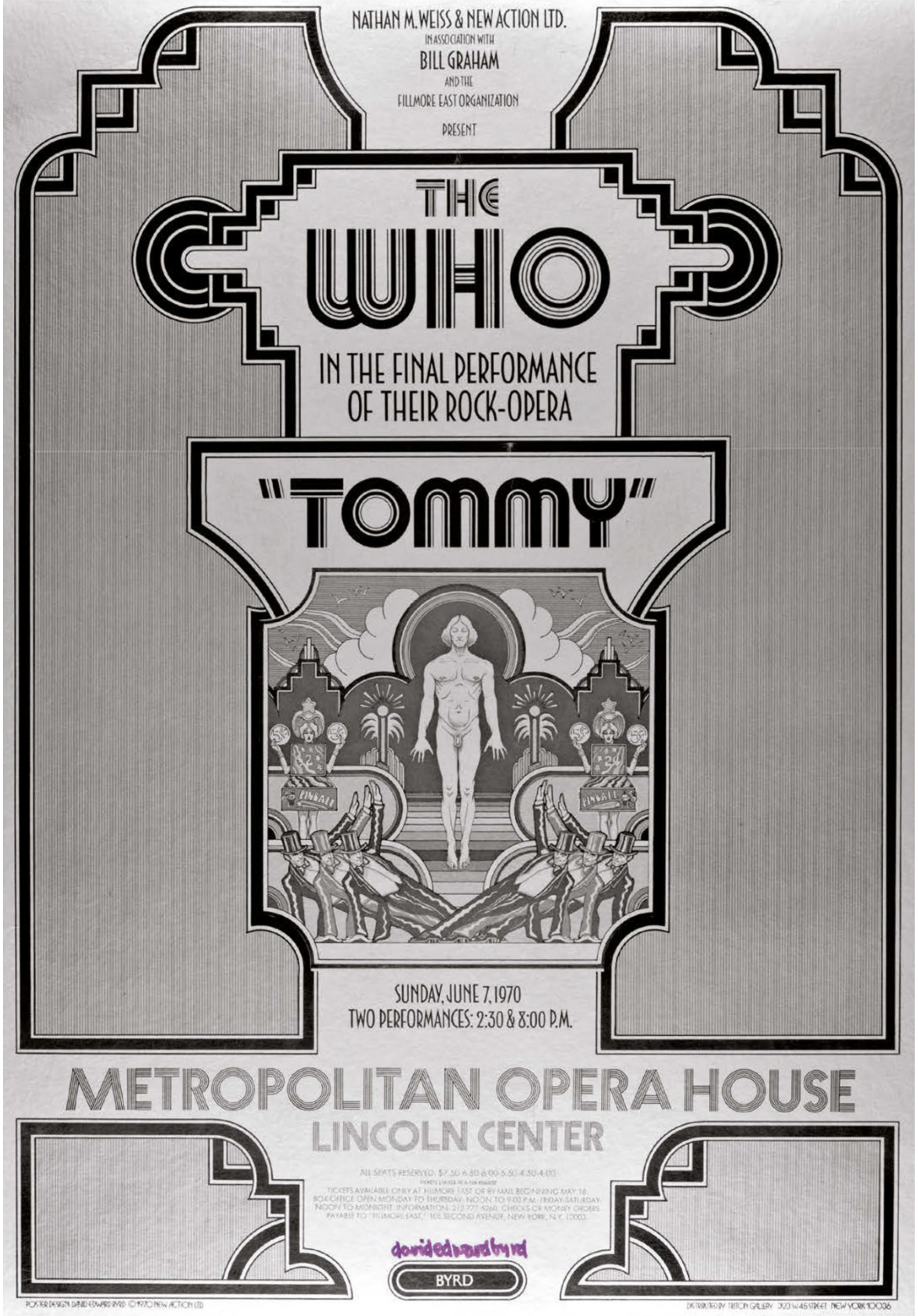
NATHAN M. WEISS & NEW ACTION LTD.
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
BILL GRAHAM
AND THE
FILLMORE EAST ORGANIZATION
PRESENT
THE
WHO
IN THE FINAL PERFORMANCE
OF THEIR ROCK-OPERA
"TOMMY"
SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 1970
TWO PERFORMANCES: 2:30 & 8:00 P.M.
METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE
LINCOLN CENTER
ALL SEATS RESERVED: $7.50 6.50 6.00 5.50 4.50 4.00
TICKETS AVAILABLE ONLY AT FILLMORE EAST OR BY MAIL BEGINNING MAY 18.
BOX OFFICE OPEN MONDAY TO THURSDAY: NOON TO 9:00 P.M. FRIDAY-SATURDAY
NOON TO MIDNIGHT. INFORMATION: 212 777-5260. CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS
PAYABLE TO "FILLMORE EAST," 105 SECOND AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10003.
davidedwardbyrd
BYRD
POSTER DESIGN: DAVID EDWARD BYRD ©1970 NEW ACTION LTD
DISTRIBUTED BY TRITON GALLERY 323 W 45 STREET NEW YORK 10036

Byrd's poster for the Who's 1970 performance of Tommy *at theMetropolitan Opera House in NewYork City depicts a production number inspired by the 1930s choreography of Busby*

Berkeley.

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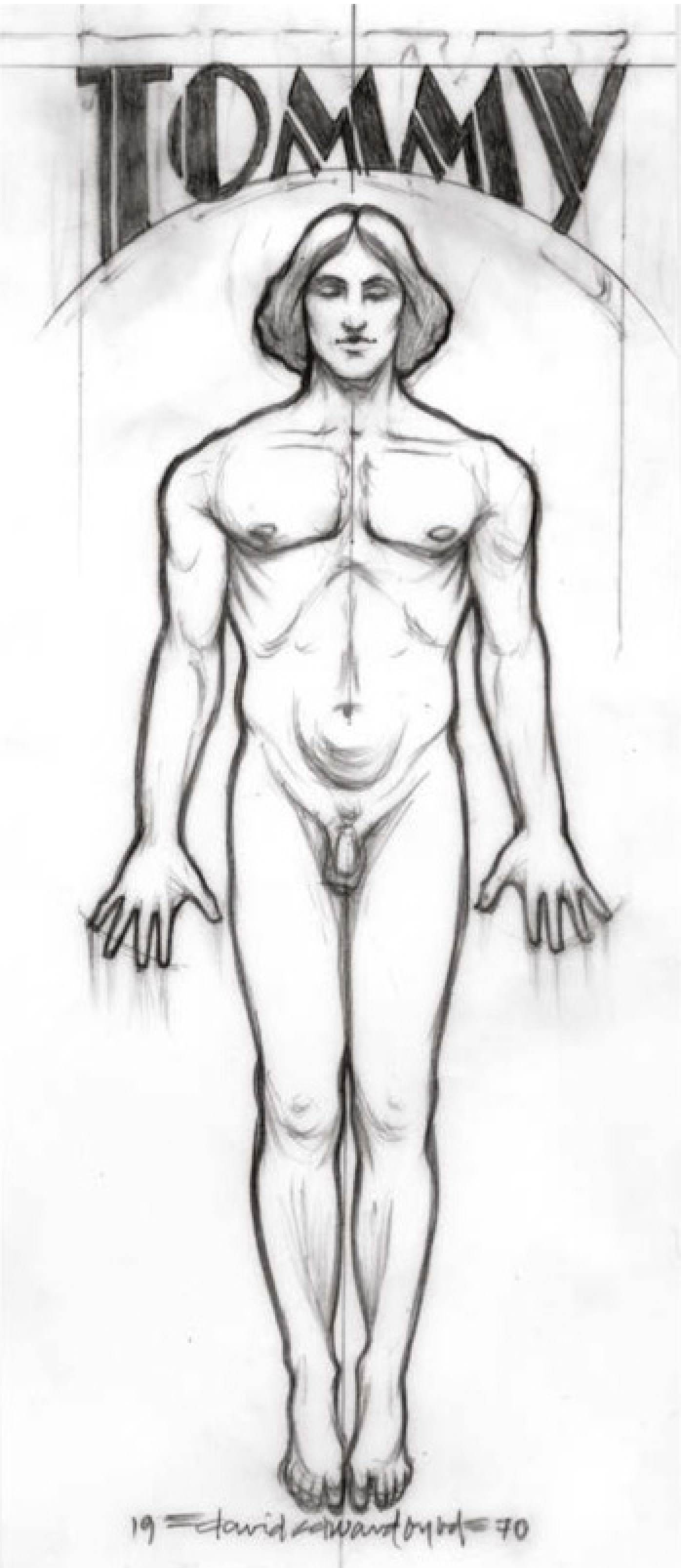
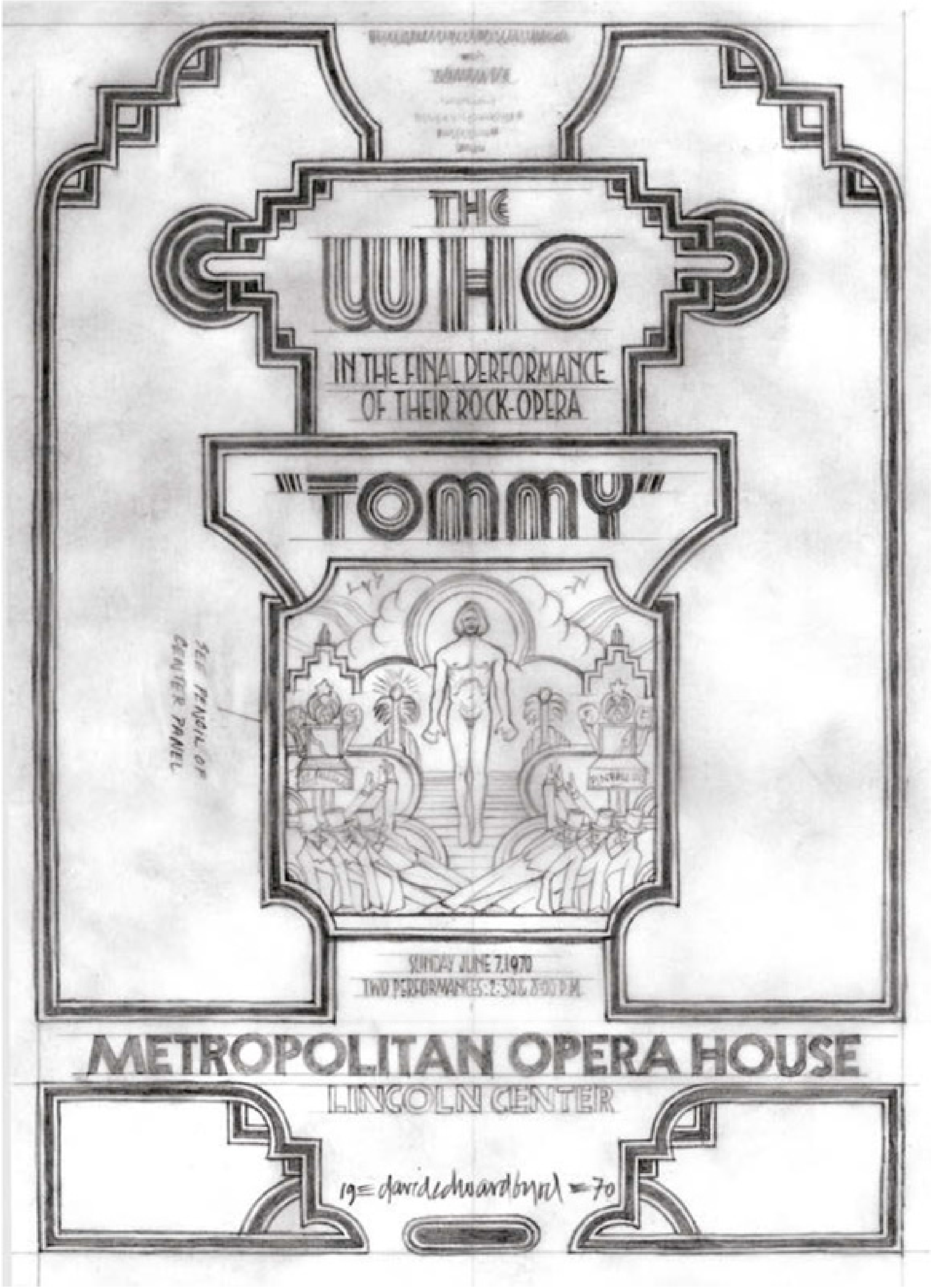
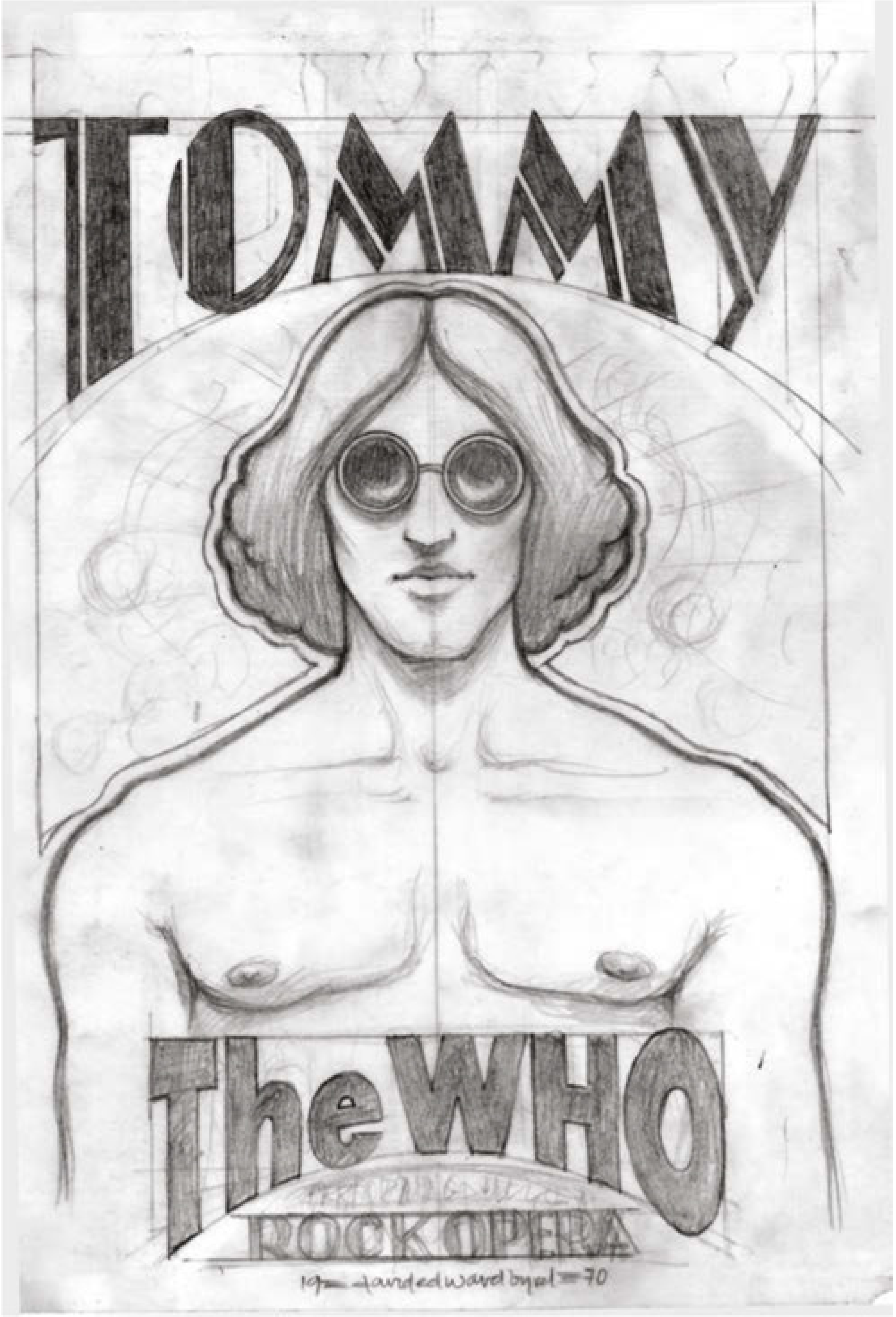

TOMMY
19 david edward byrd 70

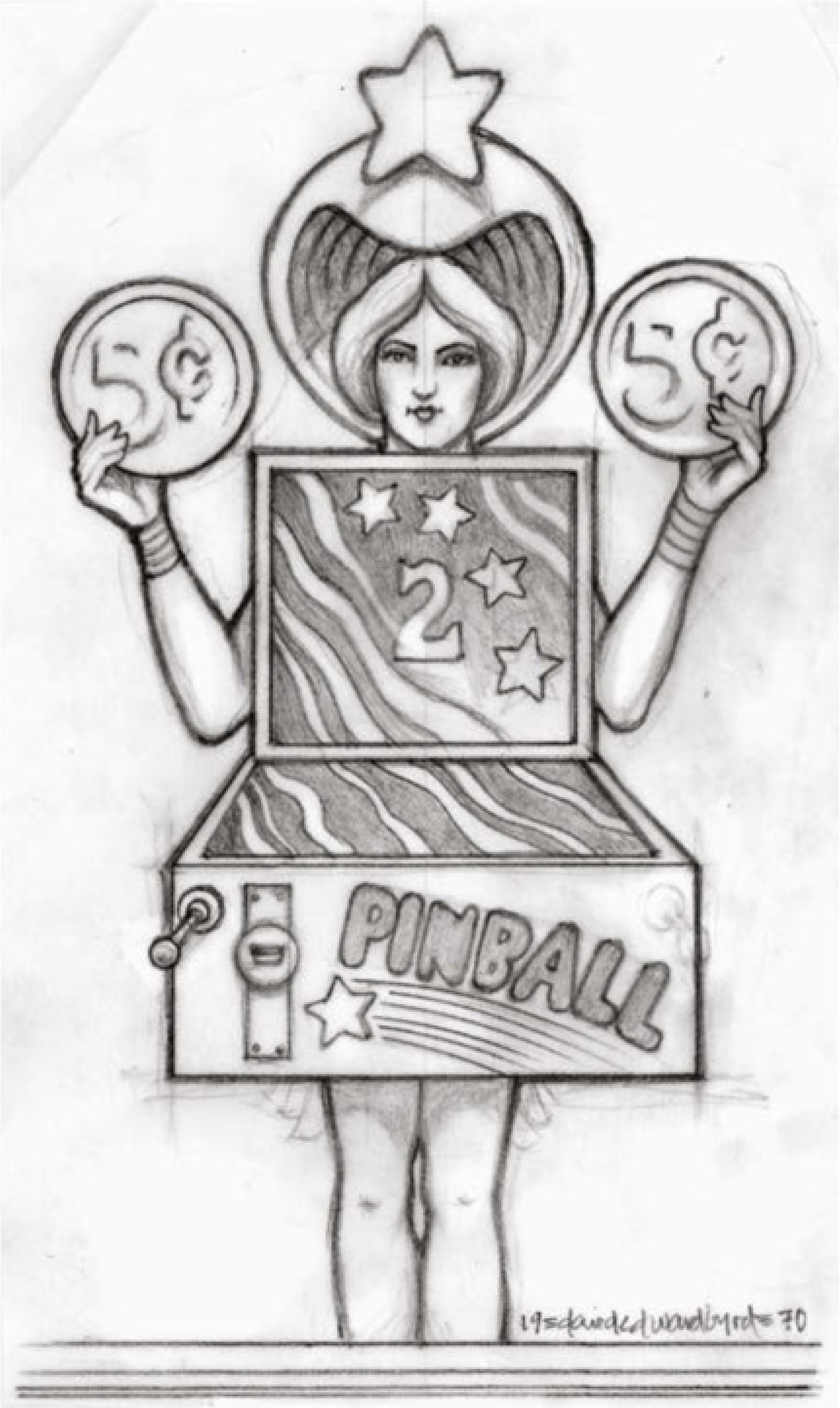
Character study for the center illustration of the poster


THE
WHO
IN THE FINAL PERFORMANCE
OF THEIR ROCK-OPERA
"TOMMY"
SEE PENCIL OF CENTER PANEL
SUNDAY JUNE 7, 1970
TWO PERFORMANCES: 2:30 & 8:00 P.M.
METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE
LINCOLN CENTER
19 davidedwardbyrd 70

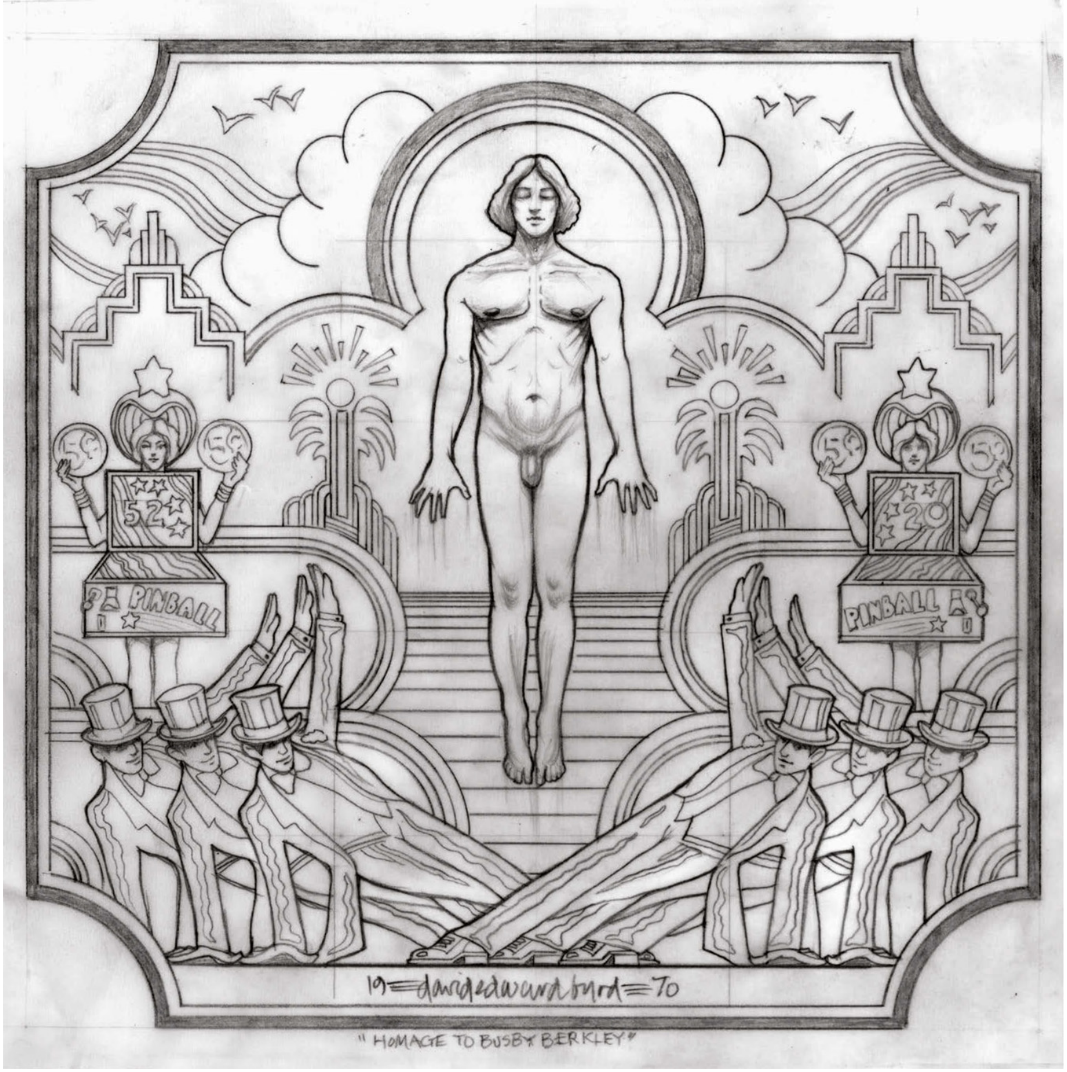
Preliminary concept sketch


TOMMY
The WHO
ROCK OPERA
19 david edward byrd 70

Byrd's sketch of Tommy, the deaf, dumb, and blind pinball wizard, was never used. When Byrd decided to put Tommy in a central panel on the poster, he needed to redraw the character to fit the new design. To date, Byrd says "I wish I would have kept the dark glasses."


5¢
5¢
2
PINBALL

This character study of a "cigarette girl" selling pinball plays was also inspired by the movies of the 1930s.


5¢
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PINBALL
5¢
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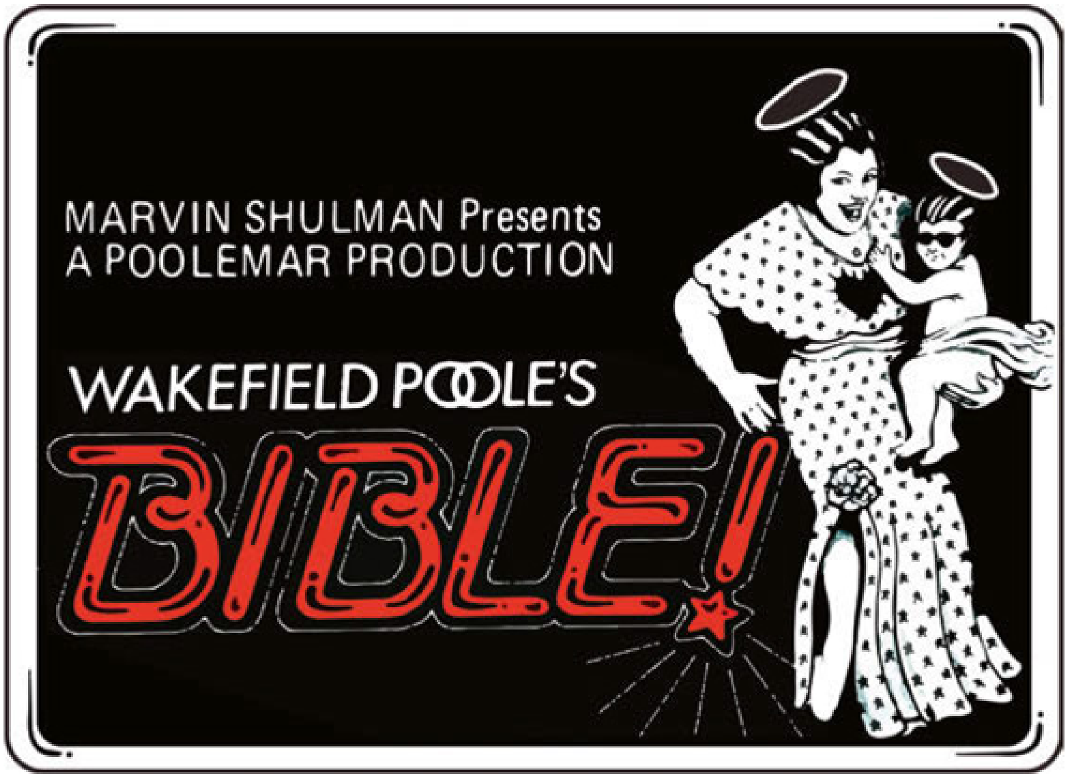
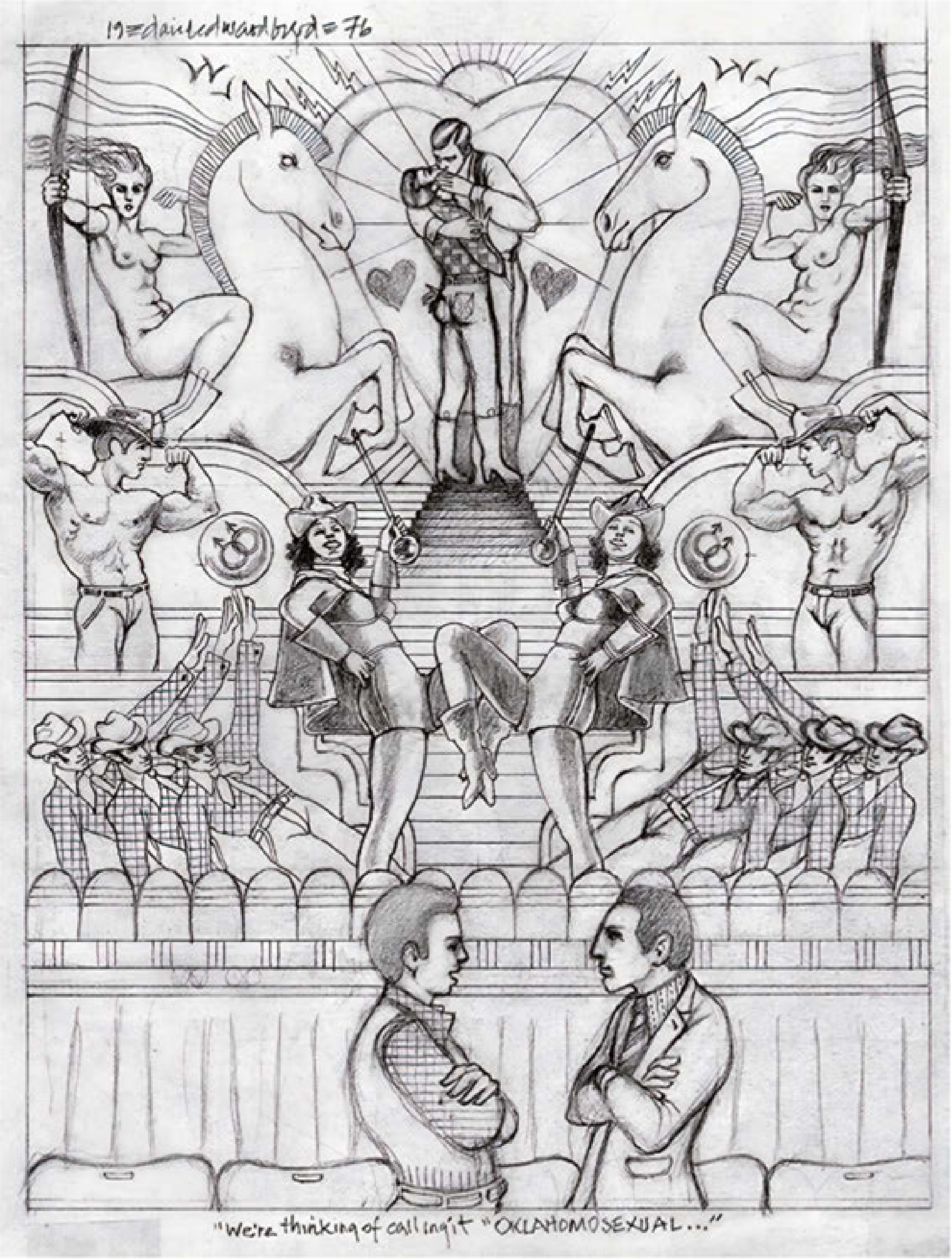
PINBALL
19 davidedwardbyrd 70
"HOMAGE TO BUSBY BERKLEY"

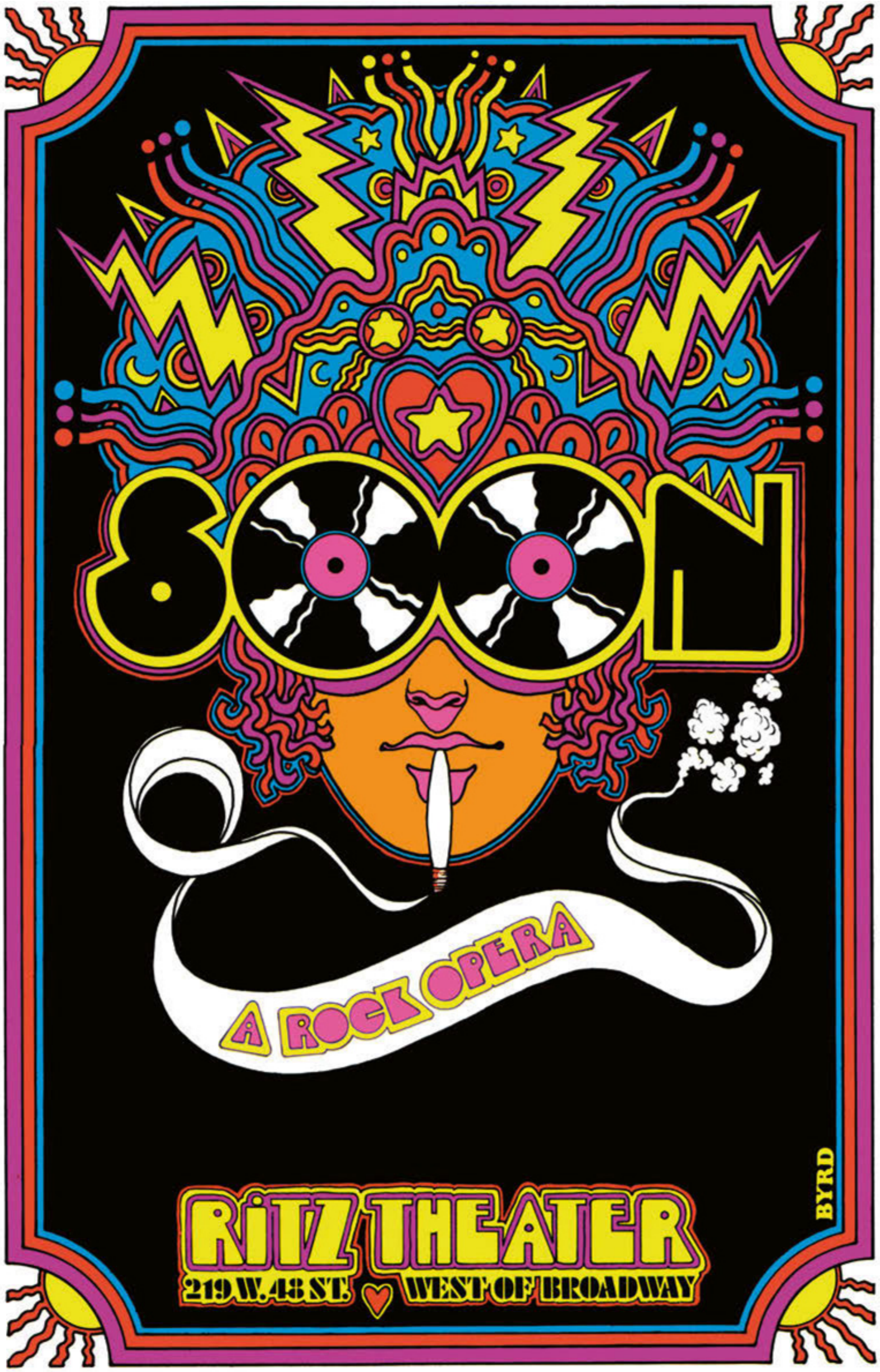
Byrd used tremendous detail in his pencil concept sketches, as seen in this concept sketch for the center panel. As he explains it, "I enjoyed drawing so much, I got carried away."


MARVIN SHULMAN Presents
A POOLEMAR PRODUCTION
WAKEFIELD POOLE'S
BIBLE!

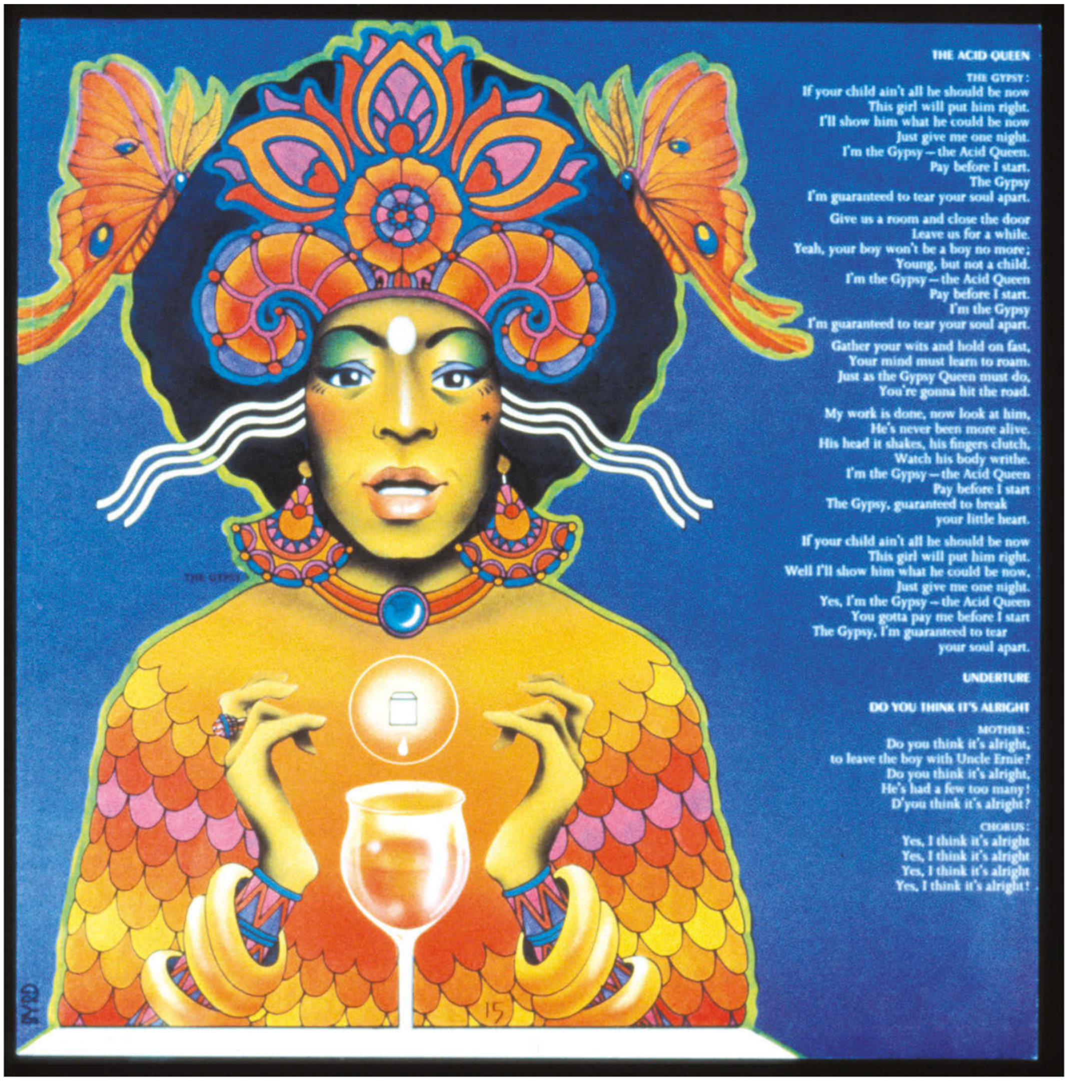
Byrd created this controversial design for the pornographic film Wakefield Poole's Bible. *The* New York Times *demanded multiple changes to the art before they would print it*.


19=daiedwardbyrd=76
"We're thinking of calling it "OKLAHOMOSEXUAL..."

This full-page cartoon for the first issue of the gay literary publication Christopher Street *includes an homage to Busby Berkeley, which was reimagined from the* Tommy *Metropolitan Opera poster. Byrd sees Berkeley as one of the greatest American choreographers and directors*.


SOON
A ROCK OPERA
RITZ THEATER
219 W. 48 ST. ♥ WEST OF BROADWAY
BYRD

Byrd's poster for the 1970 off-Broadway performance of the rock opera Soon *features the electric hair from an unused Jimi Hendrix poster design, which he often reused. As Byrd says, "When you have electric hair, show it off!"*



THE ACID QUEEN

THE GYPSY:
If your child ain't all he should be now
This girl will put him right.
I'll show him what he could be now
Just give me one night.
I'm the Gypsy – the Acid Queen.
Pay before I start.
The Gypsy
I'm guaranteed to tear your soul apart.

Give us a room and close the door
Leave us for a while.
Yeah, your boy won't be a boy no more;
Young, but not a child.
I'm the Gypsy – the Acid Queen
Pay before I start.
I'm the Gypsy
I'm guaranteed to tear your soul apart.

Gather your wits and hold on fast,
Your mind must learn to roam.
Just as the Gypsy Queen must do,
You're gonna hit the road.

My work is done, now look at him,
He's never been more alive.
His head it shakes, his fingers clutch,
Watch his body writhe.
I'm the Gypsy – the Acid Queen
Pay before I start
The Gypsy, guaranteed to break
your little heart.

If your child ain't all he should be now
This girl will put him right.
Well I'll show him what he could be now,
Just give me one night.
Yes, I'm the Gypsy – the Acid Queen
You gotta pay me before I start
The Gypsy, I'm guaranteed to tear
your soul apart.

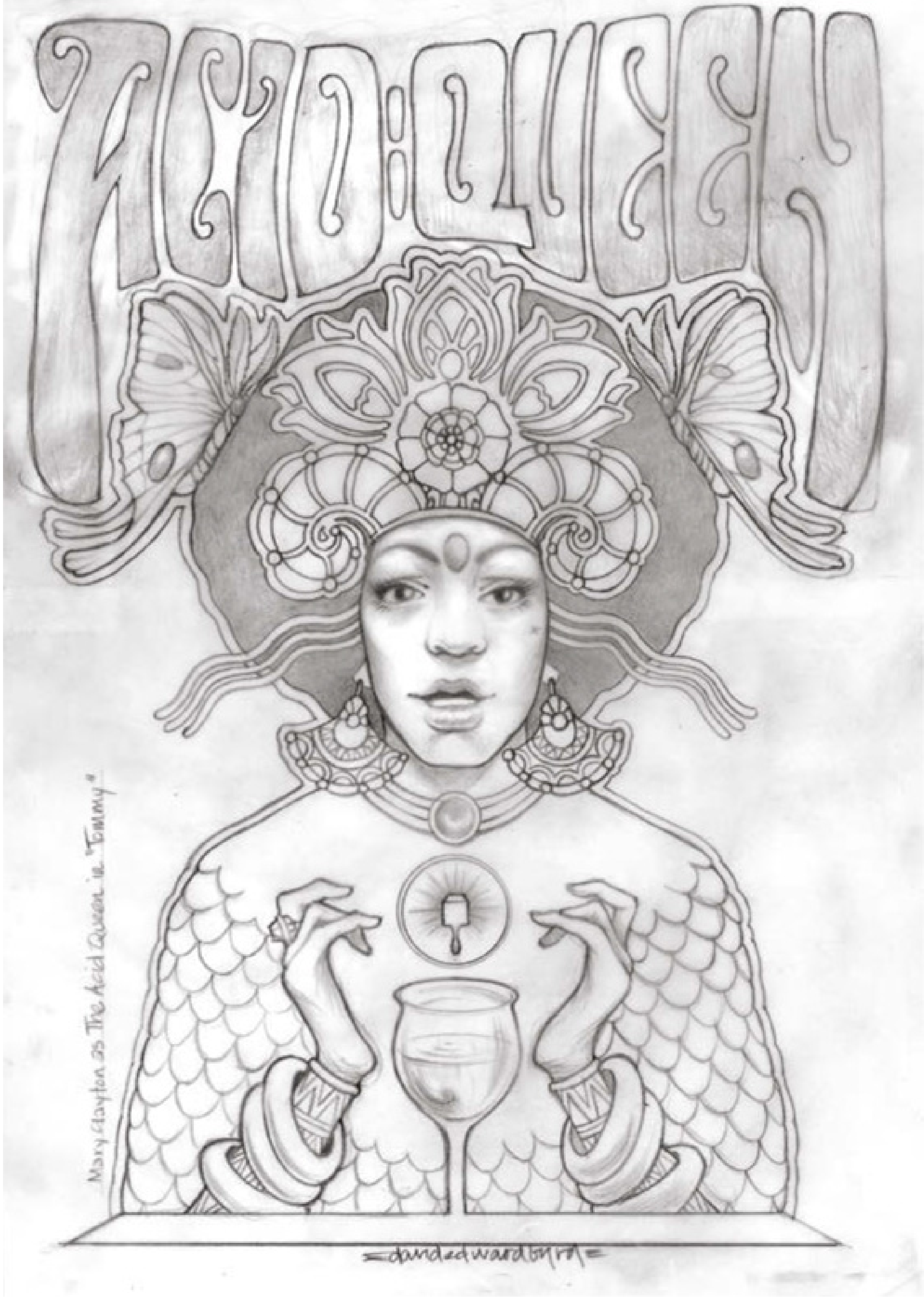
UNDERTURE

DO YOU THINK IT'S ALRIGHT

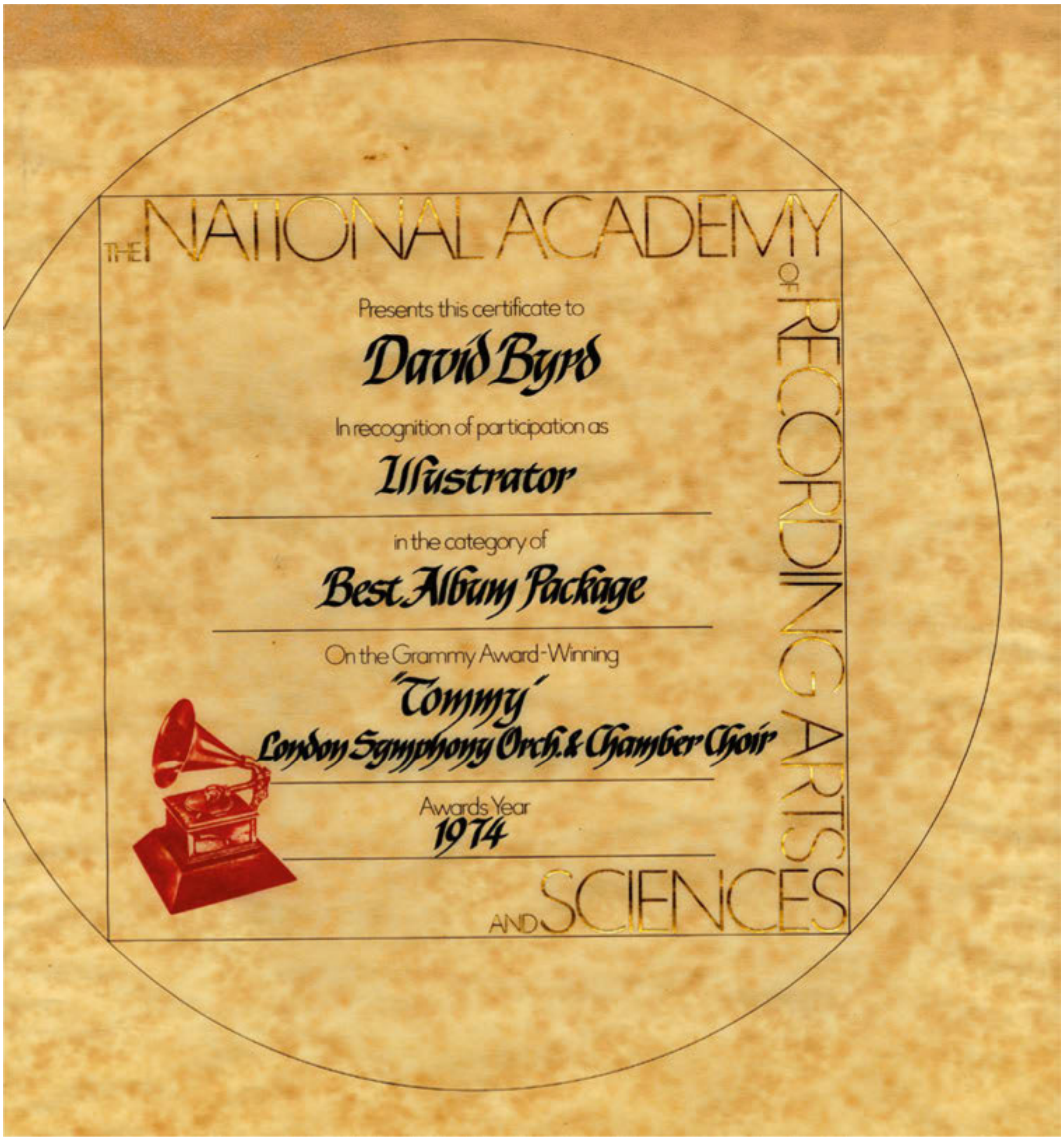
MOTHER:
Do you think it's alright,
to leave the boy with Uncle Ernie?
Do you think it's alright,
He's had a few too many!
D'you think it's alright?

CHORUS:
Yes, I think it's alright
Yes, I think it's alright
Yes, I think it's alright
Yes, I think it's alright!

Byrd's illustration of the "Acid Queen" was used in the album package for the 1972 orchestral version of Tommy, *recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra. Byrd was one of many acclaimed illustrators asked to contribute to the album art, which won a Grammy for Best Album Package.*


ACID QUEEN
Mary Clayton as The Acid Queen in "Tommy"
davidedwardbyrd

Preliminary pencil sketch of the Acid Queen



THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF RECORDING ARTS AND SCIENCES

Presents this certificate to

David Byrd

In recognition of participation as

Illustrator

in the category of

Best Album Package

On the Grammy Award-Winning

'Tommy'

London Symphony Orch. & Chamber Choir

Awards Year

1974

Byrd received a Grammy certificate for his participation in the Grammy-winning album package for the Tommy *orchestral album. In 2022, Byrd found this in his underwear drawer.*

RVG: Had you spoken to Bill about this idea of the Who at the Met, or did you only hear about it after it was a done deal?

DEB: The poster artist always seems to get the news last. That's my experience. I had no idea this was going on until I was told, "You have three days." It was not a long time. I had to create it over a weekend. The time given to create poster designs always seemed too short!

RVG: Talk a little bit about what you call the "Busby Berkeley scene" in the central rectangle. How did that come about, and how did this idea of Tommy, this messiah-type figure, and Busby Berkeley come together?

DEB: I really thought *Tommy* would be a great Busby Berkeley movie. I still worship Busby Berkeley. I think he's one of the great American artists of the twentieth century. You know, Busby's concepts were often very controversial, and so I thought of this as a Broadway extravaganza. I had pinball ladies holding giant nickels, with dancing homosexuals down front [*laughs*], and then this whole pinball panoply behind them with Tommy rising up as a pinball god.

RVG: You saw Tommy as a sort of deity?

DEB: Yeah, a blind, messianic boy-king.

RVG: And there's certainly, with the penis and everything, a little David in there as well!

DEB: Do not speak frontally if you can't measure up! The Sunday *New York Times* Arts & Leisure theater section was where all the new shows would debut their poster art. But for my *Tommy* at the Met art, they painted a black jockstrap over Tommy's tiny genitals. No male frontal nudity, thank you very much, Mr. Byrd. And it was obviously painted with a brush that only had three hairs left.

RVG: They did not!

DEB: Yes, they did. They altered the art. It was very disturbing. I think I still have the full-page ad from the Sunday *Times* somewhere in my archive. I thought it was so parochial to do such a thing in that day and age in the "paper of record," as it was pompously known. It was 1970, after all.

RVG: How did you feel about that when you saw it?

DEB: Well, everybody was immediately on the phone to me because they knew I didn't put a poorly drawn black jockstrap on Tommy.

RVG: Was Bill Graham upset by it, or did he understand?

DEB: You know, Bill was all about selling the show, so I don't think it would have mattered to him. He thought it was as stupid as everyone else. Over time, I had a few of those parochial events … where they put little panties on the girl, or a posing strap on the boy. I seem to recall I had to cover the bare breasts in the poster for *The Magic Show* in 1974. So many Americans seem to hate their bodies, it appears.

RVG: Can you think of other examples where that happened?

DEB: Well, I remember I did a poster for a pornographic film version of the Bible. I did it as a drawing of Kate Smith holding a naked baby Jesus, who was smoking a cigar and wearing sunglasses as they were trucking across the stage. In the end, they covered up baby Jesus's penis and made me remove the cigar.

RVG: Who was that for?

DEB: Wakefield Poole. He made these gay pornographic films like *Bijou* and *Boys in the Sand*, which were big hits, and he made lots of money. He wanted to do a film that was like a Hollywood movie about scenes from the Bible, but with overt sexual acts—Adam and Eve, David and Bathsheba, etc. The *New York Times* didn't like it *at all*. But I *loved* Wakefield Poole, who helped create my 1971 multimedia exhibition at the Triton Gallery on West Fourty-Fifth Street. He and his boyfriend, Peter Fisk, owned three Warhol Marilyns and were indomitable pornographers and counterculture queens. The documentary of his life is entitled *I Always Said Yes* … and he did!

RVG: Getting back to the *Tommy* at the Met poster, you sort of reused the Busby Berkeley scene in the inaugural issue of *Christopher Street* magazine in 1976, right?

DEB: Yes, that's what artists do. They steal from themselves. "Good artists borrow, great artists steal"—Picasso.

RVG: How did this come back into your consciousness when they asked you to do a cartoon for the magazine?

DEB: First of all, gays love the theater with a passion! The whole joke was about the play's title, *Oklahomosexual*, so it had to be an extravagant image of a gay musical in dress rehearsal. In the cartoon, there's these two producers at a final dress rehearsal, and one is telling the other, "We're thinking of calling it *Oklahomosexual*," which was a great joke for the inaugural issue of a gay literary magazine in 1976. I own all the Busby Berkeley films on DVD and watch them all the time. My husband, Jolino, just loves them. He knows all the names of all the featured players, so he goes, "Oh there's Joan Blondell, and there's Glenda Farrell!"

RVG: So, when *Tommy* at the Met happened, did you immediately get recognition for the poster? Was it highly collected right away?

DEB: Oh yeah, and I gave all my copies away. I was like a drunken sailor. I thought everybody should have one of my posters, to the point that I don't have any for myself! You know, I was so excited and very stupid. My old age is *Tommy*-less, alas!

RVG: Which is ironic because you gave one to me in 1993 as a housewarming present.

DEB: Oh! [*laughs*] I want it back! They're very expensive now. Count your blessings!

RVG: Did you go to the Metropolitan Opera House for the performance?

DEB: Well, of course!

RVG: So, *Tommy* comes out, and the band tours, but then in '74, the orchestral version of *Tommy* comes out. And how did you get this job?

DEB: I got called by Craig Braun from Wilkes & Braun; they were the people designing the album package and in whose name the Grammy was awarded. He told me he wanted me to do a portrait of Merry Clayton, who sings the role of the Acid Queen. They had many famous illustrators doing different characters, and I was so glad that I got the Acid Queen.

RVG: What were your thoughts when you started to put this together?

DEB: I was not familiar with Merry Clayton. First off, I had to make her look, obviously, like a queen. So I gave her butterflies on her hair, and deco scales on her costume, with many bangles and many beads. You know, not your ordinary queen, but an Acid Queen.

RVG: The packaging on this orchestral version is just astonishing!

DEB: Wilkes & Braun won a Grammy Award for it, and I received a Grammy Certificate for my participation, which I cherish. In addition to me, they hired a stellar list of illustrators, including Richard Amsel, an immensely talented guy who later did posters for *Raiders of the Lost Ark, The Sting*, and so many more. We became very, very good friends later. I first met him at the party for this release. Then, Richard called me one night and we talked for over two and a half hours about clients, art and art supplies, boyfriends, and more. After that chat, we became fast friends, and I met many of his friends as well. We sort of created a small coterie of friends that shared laughs, trips to Disneyland on reefer, surf-and-turf dinners with too much champagne, crazy videos, and an extraordinary amount of cocaine! Plus, I was no threat to Richard and his art—I was his goofy pal who, when taking too much PCP, thought he was a subatomic particle known as the Higgs boson! True story! Richard was a true artist-savant, one who must have been born with his prodigious abilities, to my thinking. His art and technique are simply uncanny! John Singer Sargent always comes to mind.

RVG: Tell me about the party for the release?

DEB: It was a fantastically lavish party in this huge remodeled nineteenth-century firehouse that Craig Braun owned in Manhattan. Wow, it was so glamorous, with photographers and exquisite food and all the art displayed. It was there that all the artists met each other. So much champagne, camaraderie, and paparazzi. I remember it as one of the most glamorous press parties I ever attended.

RVG: When you look back now at your illustration of Merry Clayton, are you happy with it?

DEB: No, I'm not, but I have different tastes now. I'm more into flat art now, rather than rendered. I did my best to make her somewhat psychedelic, but I should have made her look more evil. I now realize her image should be very frightening. She was the great villainess of the libretto. If I were to pick out my favorite posters and my favorite images, this would not be on the list. I don't hate it or anything, but it's really difficult to express. It's like trying to say there's one of your kids you don't like as much as the others. [*laughs*]

RVG: You often talk about your current work having a different quality than your old work; is that also because of the transition into the computer?

DEB: Yes. Absolutely. Wow, if I had my meds and my computer in 1974, this would be a completely different story. My meds helped make me a *lot* less crazy and obsessive than I had been. Also, it relieved years of self-loathing and depression as well, thank the mighty Zeus.

RVG: Before we leave the rock opera era, let me ask about a poster you did for a short-lived Broadway show called *Soon*.

DEB: *Soon* is another show that came to me through Roger Puckett at Triton Gallery in late December 1970. As the show was about to open in a fortnight, speed was the priority—it seemed like I was on a one-hundred-dollars-per-poster roll at this time! This was yet another "rock opera" spawned, I'm sure, by the success of Tommy. I decided to reuse the first unused sketch of Jimi Hendrix as a quick solution to this job—steal from yourself; never let a good idea lie fallow on the field of concepts, as it were. Thus, I added the sunglasses as part of the title—sOOn like zOOm—the joint in the mouth with type in the smoke, changed shapes and colors in the hair—and poster done! Do a Google search on “Soon the rock opera” and one of the first things you see is boldfaced “FLOP”! That is why it’s had a place of honor on the back wall of Joe Allen’s theater bar on Forty-Sixth Street; which, as I mentioned before, is a wall dedicated only to FLOPS. Scott Fagan, the lyricist, got in touch with me recently to buy a poster after almost fifty years. Another interesting fact—if you read the *Soon* credits, you will notice the names of future stars Richard Gere, Peter Allen, Nell Carter, and disco queen Vicki Sue Robinson.

RVG: Okay, let’s fast-forward. You had not done any work for the Who for a long time, and then Pete Townsend went out on tour in 2017 to perform *Quadrophenia*.

DEB: I thought, *Wow, this is great!* It was Pete Townsend, Billy Idol, tenor Alfie Boe, and an entire symphony orchestra at the Greek, my favorite amphitheater. Alfie Boe is a wonderful tenor, and he sang his heart out. I got a call from Ron Delsener, who was the producer at the Beacon Theater back in day. Whether he owned the theater or ran it, I’m not certain. I hadn’t seen him since I did an early logo sketch for the Beacon Theater back in the day. I did two *Quadrophenia* posters for them to choose between, but for some reason they wanted both, so I got paid extra money. I really like these two posters a great deal.

RVG: Do you remember how much you got paid?

DEB: Yeah, I think I got fifteen or twenty thousand dollars.

RVG: Wow, nice. Did they give you any direction on this?

DEB: Well, I listened to the original, and then I started collecting pictures of people on Vespas. In the show, there were the rockers, who wore leather, and mods who were very Mary Quant–like and rode Vespas. Of course, Pete was a mod. I did two versions, one with a British trumpet fanfare, [*sings trumpets*] “Da da da da da da,” and the other featured a mod on a Vespa with a Cinerama-type logo.

RVG: Did you go to the show at the Greek?

DEB: Oh yeah! Jolino and I were right there.

RVG: So, you first saw the Who at the Fillmore East in 1969, then you saw the band at the Metropolitan Opera House, and then you saw them a third time, decades later, or at least Pete Townsend. Of course, different band, different drummer, additional musicians, etc. Is there any way to compare the experiences?

DEB: I first have to say that I never cared for *Quadrophenia*. It's not something I would casually listen to. It was a very difficult piece of music to love, at least for me.

RVG: Unlike *Tommy*, which you loved, right?

DEB: Yeah. *Quadrophenia* was about really wild, crashing guitars. I'm not particularly in love with that kind of rock.

RVG: Which leads to a question: Popular music turned into rock with a capital "R" in the mid-seventies. The Who went toward heavy-duty rock, and there was Led Zeppelin and all the other bands. Did you turn off to music altogether, or did you listen to different music at the time?

DEB: I started listening to different music. Linda Ronstadt was a favorite, the Flying Burrito Brothers, and Elvis Costello. There were times when I was really into opera, and other times when I was really into composers like Mozart and Chopin.

RVG: So, all the big rock bands are not your thing?

DEB: No, I knew they were really big, and I knew their music, but it wasn't for me.

RVG: Well, that could be the reason why, by 2017, you had never heard *Quadrophenia*.

DEB: No, I really hadn't listened to it. And I like *Tommy* the album but didn't like the film. I just didn't like it at all. All I can think of now is baked beans oozing out of a TV!

RVG: I'm with you, I never really liked it either.

DEB: And I like Ann-Margret as a performer, but this role did not reveal her real talent as a performer.

RVG: Ken Russell, right? His movies are pretty avant-garde.

DEB: I liked *The Boy Friend*. That was just very imaginative. It's a film version of the stage musical by Sandy Wilson from 1954. I know all the lyrics, so when the movie came out, I liked it a lot. But the rest of them, I dunno. Like the film *Mahler*—I don't even listen to the original Mahler symphonies, so why would I go see the story of his life?

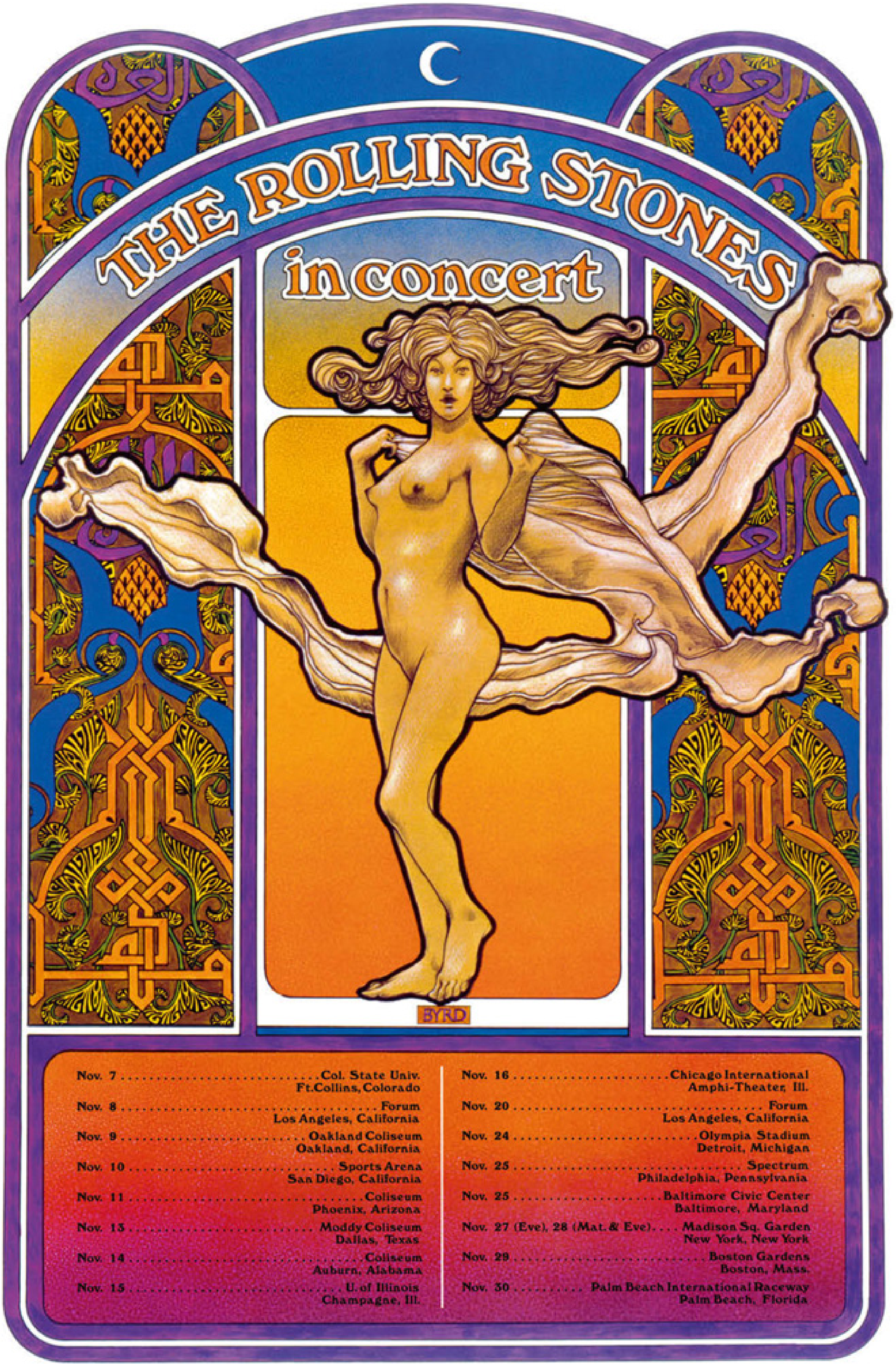
RVG: One last question about this 2017 *Quadrophenia* poster. You had mentioned that your particular creative preference has changed over the years. The Merry Clayton Acid Queen was very dimensional, very illustrative. Your computer graphics you said are like cut paper, right?

DEB: Yeah, right. Actually, more like silk-screen printing.

RVG: It's also more of a "computer" style. Is that more in keeping with the things that interest you today?

DEB: Well, this also relates to the new Fillmore East posters I'm doing, the tribute posters. Bill Graham did not produce a poster for every Fillmore East show, and before he died, he suggested I create new art for those shows that never had a poster. So that's what I'm doing now.

THE
ROLLING
STONES



THE ROLLING STONES

in concert

Nov. 7	Col. State Univ. Ft.Collins, Colorado
Nov. 8	Forum Los Angeles, California
Nov. 9	Oakland Coliseum Oakland, California
Nov. 10	Sports Arena San Diego, California
Nov. 11	Coliseum Phoenix, Arizona
Nov. 13	Moddy Coliseum Dallas, Texas
Nov. 14	Coliseum Auburn, Alabama
Nov. 15	U. of Illinois Champagne, Ill.
Nov. 16	Chicago International Amphi-Theater, Ill.
Nov. 20	Forum Los Angeles, California
Nov. 24	Olympia Stadium Detroit, Michigan
Nov. 25	Spectrum Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Nov. 25	Baltimore Civic Center Baltimore, Maryland
Nov. 27 (Eve), 28 (Mat. & Eve)	Madison Sq. Garden New York, New York
Nov. 29	Boston Gardens Boston, Mass.
Nov. 30	Palm Beach International Raceway Palm Beach, Florida

To make the final poster for the 1969 Rolling Stones tour, Byrd utilized spray Magic Marker to create a gradation, as he did not *know how to airbrush at the time*.

1969

By 1969, the Rolling Stones had not hit the road in the United States for three years, so it was no surprise when the *New York Times* called their endof-decade tour the "rock event of the year." Being in the right place and right time yet again, Byrd gets the call for a tour poster, and he draws in all his artistic influences for a timeless design. But getting paid is a whole nother story.

Robert von Goeben: Let's talk about the Rolling Stones and the tour poster they commissioned from you.

David Edward Byrd: Oh yeah, right, in 1969.

RVG: So how did this come into your world? Who called you?

DEB: It was Bill Graham who suggested me to Allen Klein, who was the Rolling Stones' manager. Klein was kind of a schmucky guy, but everybody paid deference to him because he was very powerful. I created this poster for the Rolling Stones in September of 1969, in my tiny yellow studio on West Seventieth Street. The original design did not have venues listed on the poster, so I left a blank space where venues would print the stadium, address, times, ticket info, etc. in the bottom box. That was the "snipe box" I made for the posters. Many promoters didn't know what the fuck it was for, but some promoters did. Today, you can find versions of this poster that have a single event or all the events.

RVG: So what was Allen Klein like when he called you?

DEB: Yeah, he tried to not pay me! My fee was my usual five hundred dollars. Allen Klein was just thrilled by his very own existence. I knew a lot of people who worked with him, and they all agreed that he was not the nicest guy in the world.

RVG: How did the design come about?

DEB: I was very much in love with Eadweard Muybridge's *The Human Figure in Motion*. He did all these stop-motion photographs of people and things moving. Horses galloping, men running, women dancing, that kind of thing. Through Muybridge's work they discovered that all of a horse's hooves went off the ground when it was running. No one knew that until Muybridge did those first stop-motion photos. It was through studying the English painter Francis Bacon, who was one of my favorite artists, that I found out about Muybridge. Francis Bacon used some of his dog photos as a reference in his paintings. That's how I got turned on to Muybridge.

RVG: Did Allen Klein give you any direction for the art?

DEB: No, nothing. I made two sketches and decided on the Muybridge-inspired design. This woman is one of the many women Muybridge photographed dancing with schmattas [fabrics], carrying buckets, and holding babies. They were all nudes, and they all showed men, women, and animals in motion. I was fascinated by this shit, really. Muybridge was a true inspiration for me.

RVG: Did you see a connection between the Rolling Stones and the images?

DEB: Oh, it's not related to the band at all. Though when Mick Jagger saw it, I was told he said, "Oh, it's me in drag; I love drag!" [*laughs*] I'm not sure if that's true, but everybody was happy. When Mick Jagger said something was done, it was *done*.

RVG: Did they want the snipe portion on the bottom, or was that your idea?

DEB: No, that was my idea. I knew somebody was going to ask, "Where do we put the info?" So, I took for granted that they were going to think about that. I've seen one of these Rolling Stone posters where nothing but a big "sold out" was stamped in the snipe box. [*laughs*]

RVG: Did people typically write in the information by hand, or was it printed?

DEB: No, they would do a snipe, which sometimes was printed on a piece of paper and then glued on. Or it was surprinted on in big, black, bold letters. They'd write something like "XXX Stadium" and then "All tickets seven dollars" all in big black type. Oddly, some venues didn't add anything at all.

RVG: What art techniques did you use on the poster?

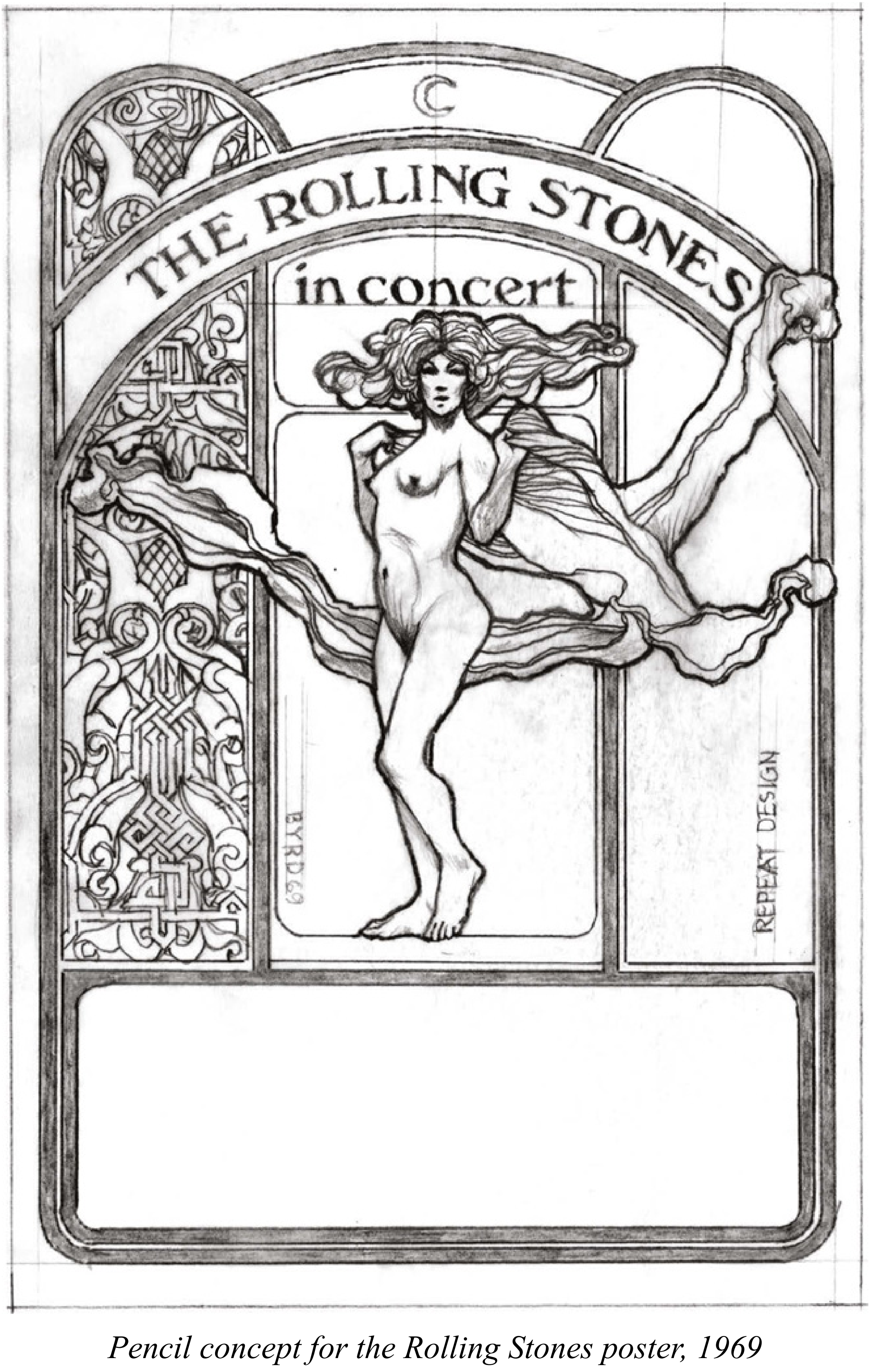
DEB: When I look at this now, I think, *My god, I didn't know how to do anything!* I didn't even know how to airbrush. The gradation in the background is spray Magic Marker. It's like orange spray marker, yellow spray marker, and blue spray marker. It was Magic Marker in a can. [*laughs*] It's a transparent, high-chroma, alcohol-based ink. I don't know how the fuck I did it, but I did.

RVG: The precision is really good.

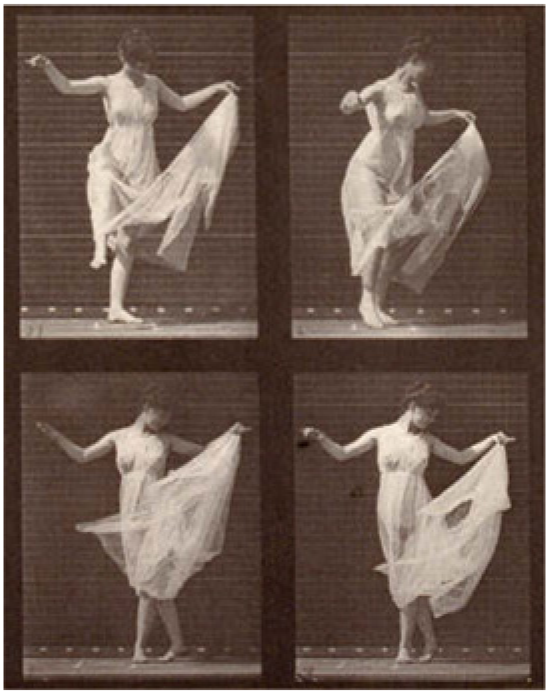
DEB: Well, thank you. After inking it, I had to paint all this by hand with Dr. Ph. Martin's Synchromatic Transparent Watercolor. As for the dancing figure, this was drawn with colored pencil on a separate piece of Canson buff-toned paper. I just drew her, cut her out, and glued her on top of the background image. In the background, I used Near Eastern patterns, as I wanted there to be something complexly decorative behind the fancy lady.

RVG: You did patterns like this on the original Woodstock poster, as well as your Jefferson Airplane cover for *Stereo Review*.

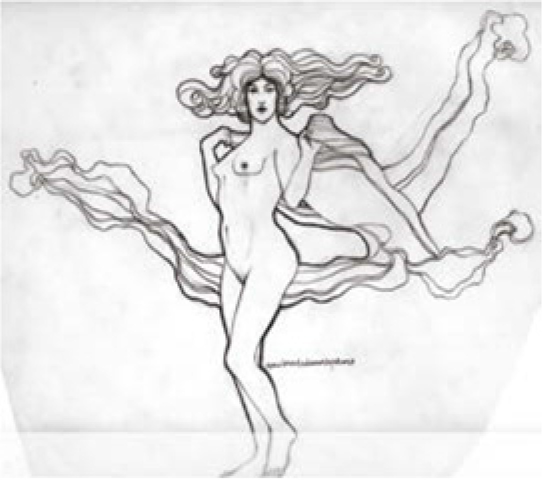
DEB: At the time, I was just crazy about Gustav Klimt. The Carnegie Museum of Art, which was the major art museum in Pittsburgh and just down the street from Carnegie Tech, had a large German Expressionism show that I went to. I was just stunned! My eyes were poppin' out of my head. Oh, and Egon Schiele. I was crazy about that guy. I was so influenced by him. He was one of those artists I wish I could be—though he only lived to twenty-eight, dying during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918.


©
THE ROLLING STONES
in concert
BYRD 69
REPEAT DESIGN

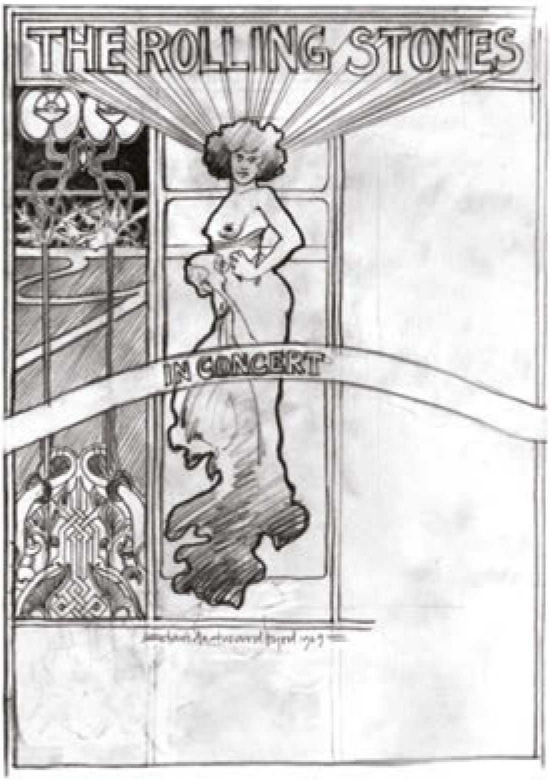
Pencil concept for the Rolling Stones poster, 1969



Never at a loss for creative inspiration, Byrd found motivation for the 1969 Rolling Stones poster in the groundbreaking photography of Eadweard Muybridge.



After he presented this character study pencil drawing concept, Byrd was told Mick Jagger loved it because it looked like him in drag.



This second version of the poster was never presented.

RVG: You were putting these very deep influences into your art, but was it lost on people at the time?

DEB: I don’t think most of the public are aware of the influences that artists use, nor should they, unless it is an obvious spoof. Sometimes I felt like I didn’t know how to do what I’m doing. I was rapidly absorbing the techniques of illustration that I never had learned in art school.

RVG: Did you see the Stones on this tour?

DEB: Yeah, I saw them when they were in New York at Madison Square Garden. I attended with Noel Monk [Fillmore employee and later manager of Van Halen] and a bottle of Rémy Martin.

RVG: Was he working the show at all?

DEB: No, but he knew everybody who was anybody. So, we got to go backstage and all that shit.

RVG: What was backstage like at a Rolling Stones concert?

DEB: Oh, it was pretty chaotic. I mean, it wasn't thrilling, but it was very interesting. Noel knew everybody and introduced me to all these guys, but I wasn't really a star-struck person. We were very drunk by the time we got backstage. Then we got stoned, and I remember sitting in a chair for a long time watching all the groupies. Some of them I knew by sight because my art school friend Peter Nevard made a documentary called *Groupies*.

RVG: How was the concert?

DEB: Well, it was pretty outrageous. They did all the oldies and goodies; they did a *show*, man. Did they ever know how to do it!

RVG: So, when you called Allen Klein to get paid for designing this Stones poster, did he blow you off?

DEB: ABKCO, Klein's company, would never call me back. I had heard of Klein's reputation for not paying until the lawyers showed up. So I called Bill Graham, because I was still working for him. I called him and said, "It appears that Allen Klein is just not gonna pay me." And you know what Bill did? He attached the box office of the shows he was promoting until I got paid. He held the box office earnings until I was paid my lousy five hundred dollars!

RVG: Amazing! Which, of course, was a ton of money, right?

DEB: Yeah, Allen Klein recognized that. He would recognize hundreds of thousands of dollars but not little pissant five-hundred-dollar me.

RVG: Do you remember Bill's reaction when you talked to him?

DEB: Oh, yeah. He said, "Oh, Allen Klein is a fuckin' son of a bitch, I'll get your money." And Bill got my money! Five hundred dollars, big deal. You know, that's the kind of schmuck that Allen Klein was.

RVG: It showed once again you don't fuck with Bill Graham, right?

DEB: Oh, you don't. No, I mean, I was kind of stunned that he did that, but he was really good to the people who worked for him.

RVG: To him, was it about honor and keeping your word?

DEB: Oh yeah! If he said he was gonna pay you one hundred dollars, he'd pay you one hundred dollars. Even if he didn't like what you did, he paid you because it was a deal. That's why I always loved him, even though he was often crazy as a loon. I didn't want to spend a lot of time with him, as his energy was way too high for me. [*laughs*]

RVG: Did Allen Klein ever call you again to do work?

DEB: No, but I believe on the fiftieth anniversary of the tour, ABCKO paid me five thousand dollars to use the poster again for a signed, limited-edition reprint. And this time I got paid right away!

THEATER

1971–2013

One door closes and another opens. In 1971, Bill Graham decides to close the Fillmore music halls, but then Broadway comes knocking. Byrd, fresh off a red-hot run of rock posters, answers the call and redefines the graphics of theater. He creates historic theater poster designs for *Follies* and *Godspell*. By 1976, Byrd's work is celebrated in a bicentennial poster exhibit at the Smithsonian, and his career is firing on all cylinders.

Robert von Goeben: Talk about your Broadway poster work, starting with your famous design for *Follies*.

David Edward Byrd: I heard through my friend Roger Puckett of Triton Gallery that producer Hal Prince, who had done the Broadway musicals *Cabaret* and *Company*, was mounting a musical about the end of the Ziegfeld era with music and lyrics by Steven Sondheim. Roger called the Blaine Thompson Agency, who was handling public relations for the show. He spoke to the art director, Morris Robbins, who said I could present but they'd already spent all their sketch-artist money hiring fourteen artists to do poster presentations. Being unknown, I was not asked to this rodeo, so Roger asked if I could submit a sketch as a freebie, and Robbin's response was, "We love free!" So I did this small sketch—about five by seven inches, as I recall—based on a picture of Gloria Swanson in the ruins of the Roxy Theater, which they provided to me. Luckily for me, my little sketch was the one chosen out of all the sketches presented. I was rather shocked by this! So then they told me, “Okay, we love this, but we gotta change this girl; she looks like a bull dyke.”

RVG: They said that?!

DEB: They actually said this to me! “We want her to have really big breasts so you can see the cleavage. We want her in a red dress, and we want her to be very sexy and have huge hair coming down over her shoulders. Big tits and a red dress.” They told me my inspiration should be Dolly Parton, who was very big at the time. So they wanted me to use Dolly Parton as my inspiration, and I thought, *Oh my god, this is horrible*. I just wanted to kill myself. They wanted her to look 1970s, which theater producers often did at that time. The musical itself is set at the end of the deco period, the 1940s. I was just crushed, because I thought, *If I do what they ask, I’m gonna be laughed off the street*. It seemed so sad and ridiculous that they were making it into a bad poster without even realizing it.

RVG: So what did you do?

DEB: I went home and did what they wanted for this second iteration, and the result was horrible, as I thought it would be. I then thought to myself, *What am I gonna do? I’ve got two days! What am I gonna do?* And what I did was this: I started looking through this book I had titled *Four Fabulous Faces: Swanson, Garbo, Crawford, Dietrich* by Larry Carr. In there, I found this picture of Marlene Dietrich in a still from the movie *Shanghai Express*, where she was sort of looking up and crossing her arms. I did a quick sketch with a kind of a marquee hat—actually, a titular headdress that spelled out “Follies.” It took me about five to eight hours to complete the new alternative.

RVG: So you morphed Dolly Parton into Marlene Dietrich?

DEB: Yes. As the story was set in 1941, Dietrich was a very deco-inspired star, you know. It was a great face from which to begin my new design.

RVG: So you were able to get them off hair and tits?

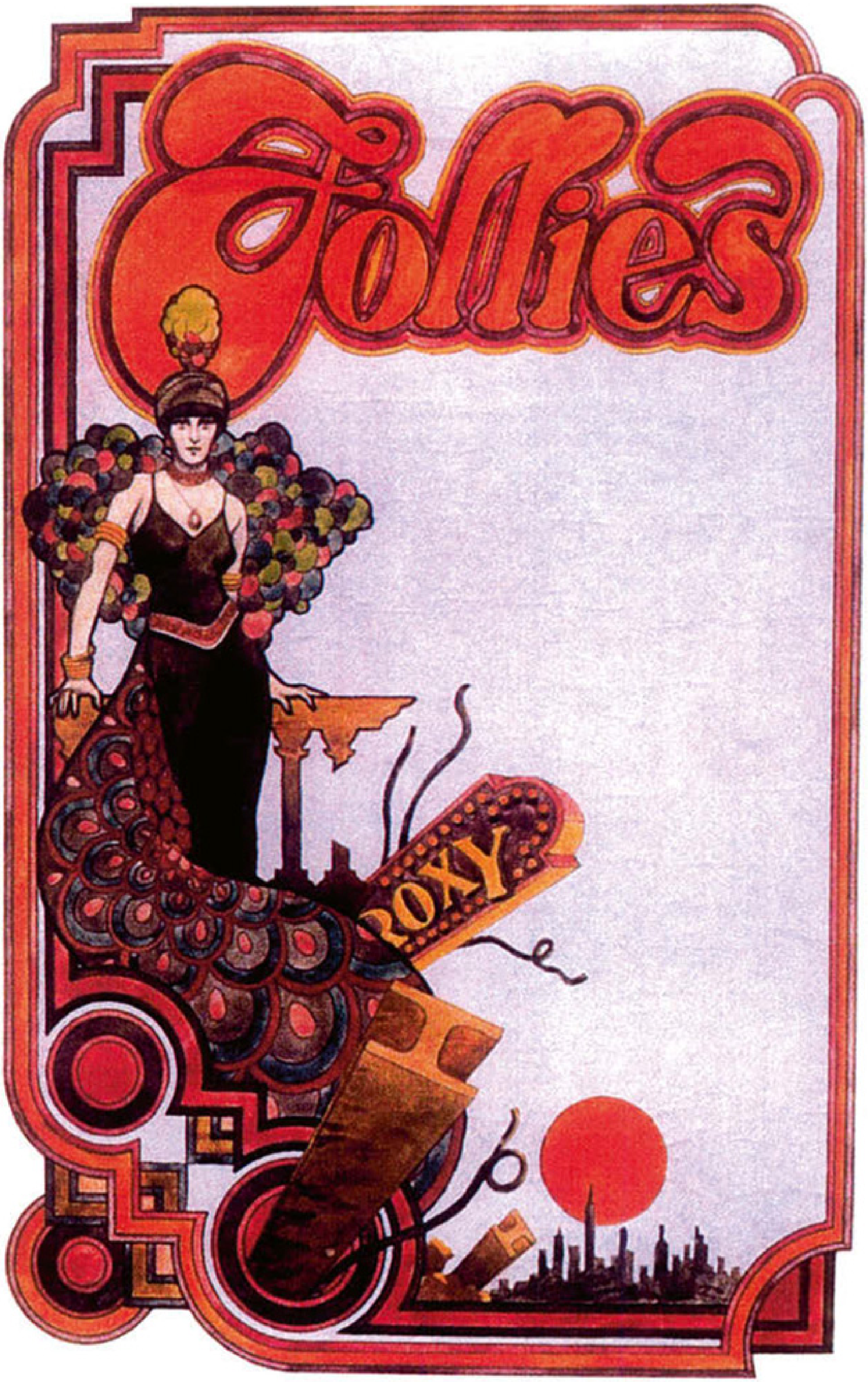
DEB: Oh yeah, they never even mentioned Dolly Parton again.

RVG: Could it be that their comments were just off the cuff?

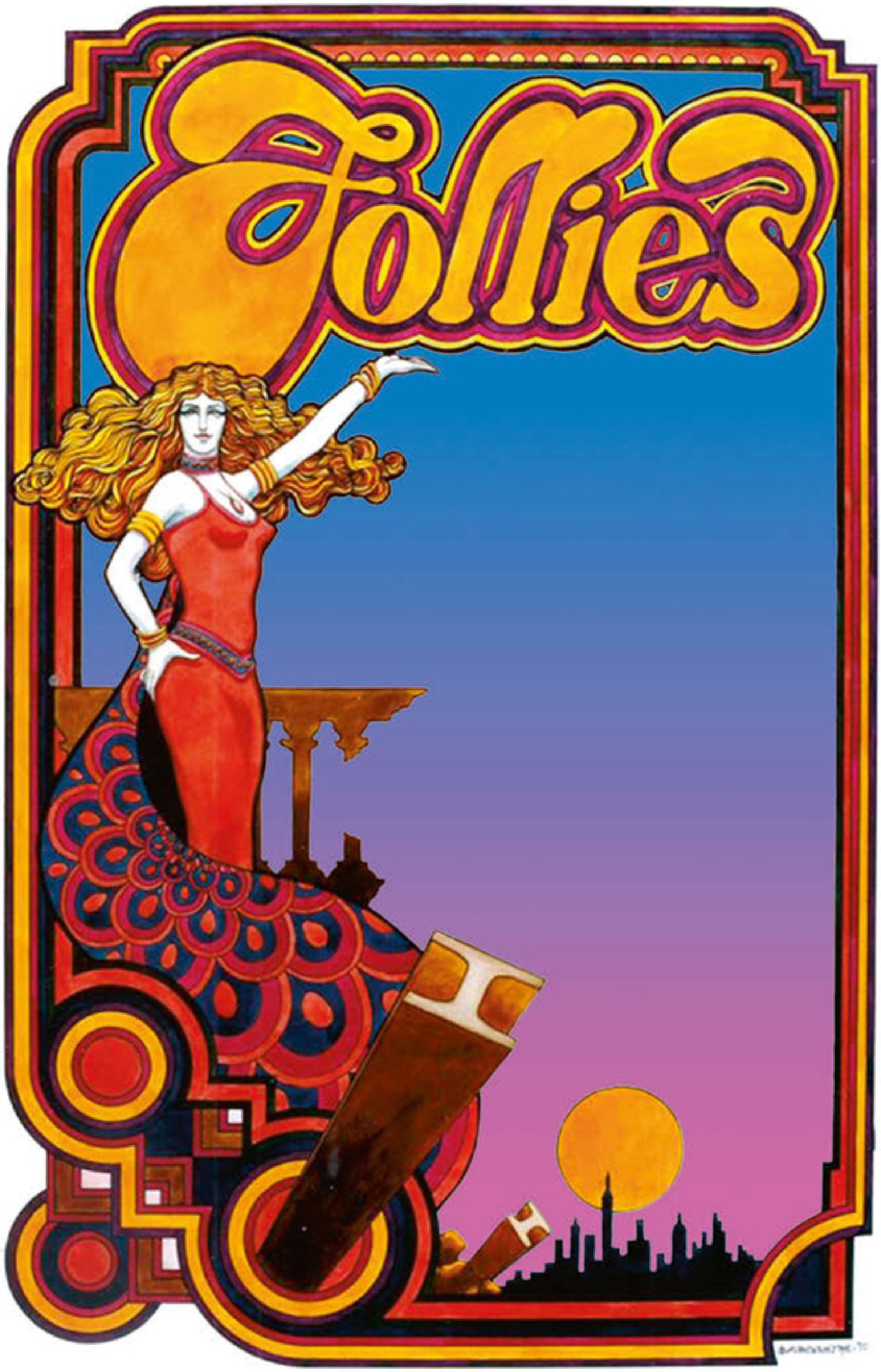
DEB: Oh yeah, they were just blabbing. They were just trying to be part of the making of the art. Some art directors do that all the time. Not *good* art directors, but some crappy art directors do that. And the art director at the Blaine Thompson Agency, he would have done anything they wanted at that time, though he became a good friend later on. The producers had lots of moneymaking hits under their belt, and I had nada, nientes, bupkis, nothing! But they never mentioned the seventies thing again after they saw the next comp, perhaps because I did it in full color and full size, and it was hard to ignore—*and* it was very neo-deco in spirit.

RVG: So when the other direction wasn't working, you just changed direction, showed them your vision, and they loved it? Did they make many changes?

DEB: I wasn't there when it was shown to them. I was at home working on another job, but it appears they were astounded. Then I got a call from Hal Prince, and he said "This is the greatest theater poster I've ever seen. The greatest Broadway poster ever!" I was not used to receiving such encomiums and embraced them whole-heartedly, of course. And if you look at the bottom of the pencil sketch today, you can see Steven Sondheim's phone number. I just wrote his number there because I was looking at this sketch when I got the approval. And when I spoke to Sondheim later, he said, "I am so thrilled with this art." As an added bonus, *Follies* opened on April 4, 1971. My thirtieth birthday! How's that for timing? This coincidence of dates made it easy for me to think it was cosmically ordained.

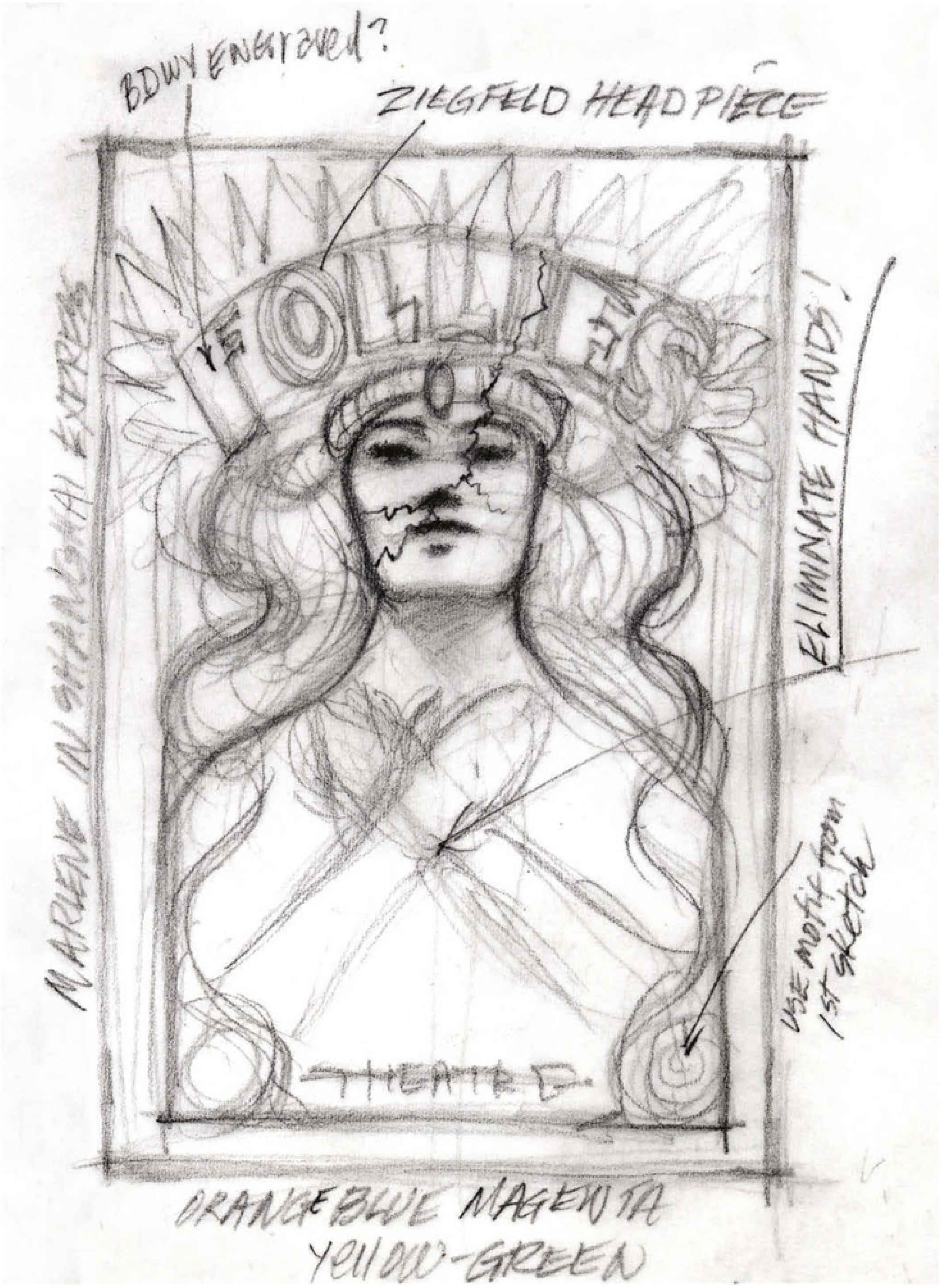

Follies
ROXY

The design for Byrd's first color sketch for the 1971 Broadway musical Follies *was based on a photograph provided to him of Gloria Swanson in the ruins of the Roxy Theatre*.

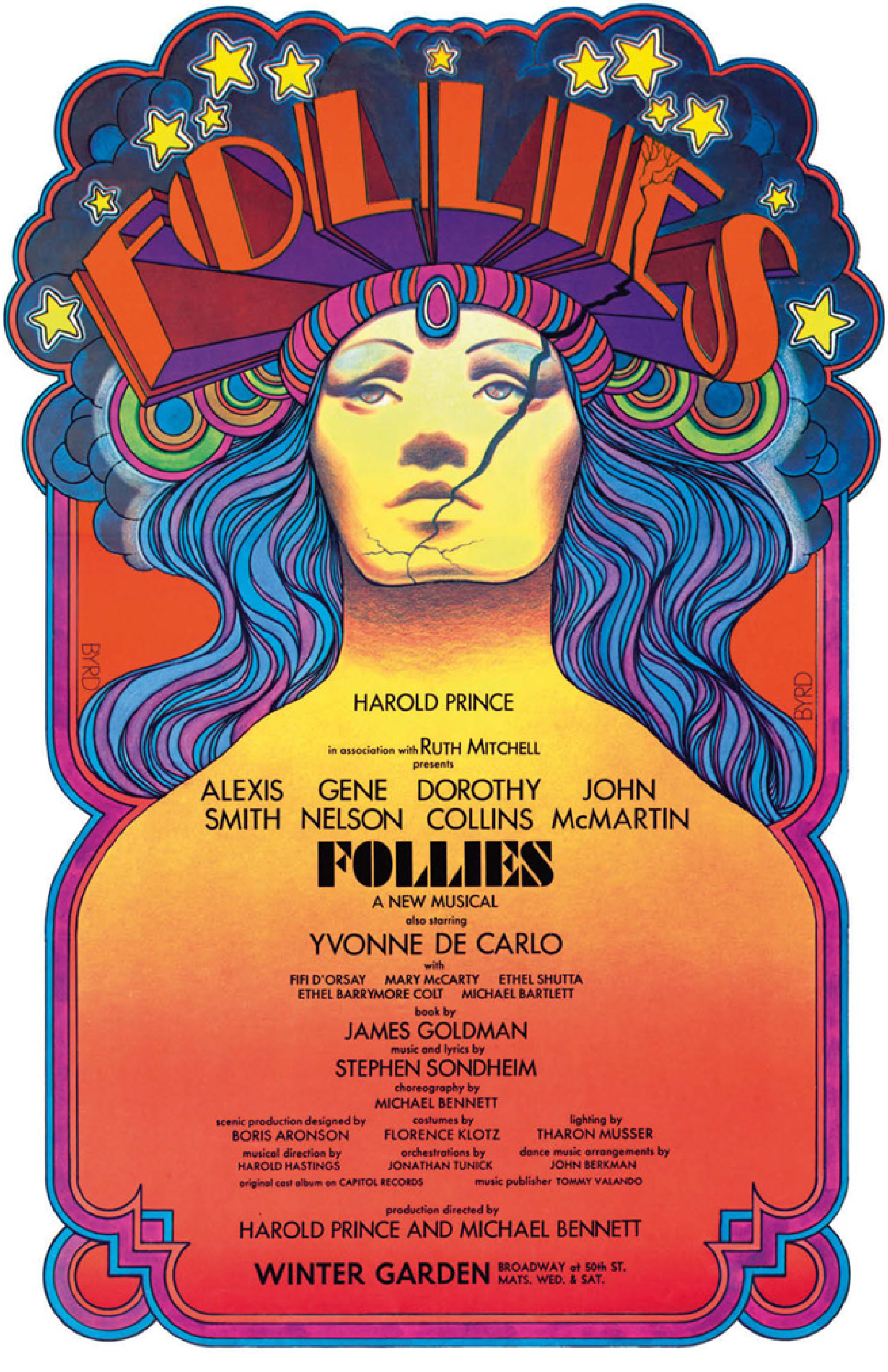


SKETCH #1 REVISED "FOLLIES" DAVID EDWARD BYRD 857-8908

The second color sketch for Follies *was done specially at the request of the producers, though Byrd hated the concept. He presented it with the famous "cracked-face" design, which was approved, and according to Byrd, the design was "thankfully never mentioned again."*


BDWY ENGRAVED?
ZIEGFELD HEADPIECE
FOLLIES
MARLENE IN SHANGHAI EXPRESS
ELIMINATE HANDS!
USE MOTIF FROM 1ST SKETCH
THEATRE
ORANGE BLUE MAGENTA
YELLOW-GREEN

Byrd's original concept drawing for Follies *was a simple doodle at first, after which Byrd soon arrived at his "a-ha moment." The color ideas notated on the sketch are very close to what was used in the final poster. The face was based on Marlene Dietrich in Josef von Sternberg's film* Shanghai Express.



HAROLD PRINCE

in association with RUTH MITCHELL
presents

ALEXIS SMITH GENE NELSON DOROTHY COLLINS JOHN McMARTIN

FOLLIES

A NEW MUSICAL

also starring

YVONNE DE CARLO

with

FIFI D'ORSAY MARY McCARTY ETHEL SHUTTA
ETHEL BARRYMORE COLT MICHAEL BARTLETT

book by
JAMES GOLDMAN

music and lyrics by
STEPHEN SONDHEIM

choreography by
MICHAEL BENNETT

scenic production designed by
BORIS ARONSON

costumes by
FLORENCE KLOTZ

lighting by
THARON MUSSER

musical direction by
HAROLD HASTINGS

orchestrations by
JONATHAN TUNICK

dance music arrangements by
JOHN BERKMAN

original cast album on CAPITOL RECORDS

music publisher TOMMY VALANDO

production directed by
HAROLD PRINCE AND MICHAEL BENNETT

WINTER GARDEN BROADWAY at 50th ST.
MATS. WED. & SAT.

Byrd's finished poster for the 1971 Broadway production of Follies *is now considered one of the greatest theater posters ever created.*

RVG: When you landed on this concept, did you know you had it?

DEB: Well, I hoped I had done something special. I thought that this was so much better than the suggested changes, and it turned out that it was. It's still now considered by some critics as one of the greatest of all the Broadway posters.

RVG: Did you go through your own artistic binary process of, "I don't have it; I don't have it; *now* I have it?"

DEB: Well, sometimes you go through a cycle, and I did go through a cycle because I created the design they wanted first. Sometimes you had to create the changes they wanted or talk them out of it. And since most of the producers aren't artists, a lot of them don't know about anything except box-office receipts. They can monetize anything in a minute. But when they talk about art, they often don't know what they're talking about. Today, if you look at the preliminary sketch art closely, you can see where I used a template to make all those circles as a guide for later inking. So I was already thinking that this second version with the headdress and crack in the face was going to be the final art.

RVG: You had a sense that you would need this later because they would accept this design?

DEB: Yes. They were more thrilled than I thought they would be because I sent both the full-size revised first sketch and a full color comp of my new idea. And they wanted to print my new idea right away, but I had to say "Well, you know, I just did this as a comp." So then I re-created the art as a perfect finished piece.

RVG: The crack in the face on the poster has become so iconic; it perfectly captured the feeling of the show.

DEB: So much so that, for years afterward, people tried to take credit for the idea. I call it "the old crack-in-the-face shit." The crack is in my original pencil sketch, which *no one* ever saw but me! I used this pencil sketch to transfer the image to the illustration board, which I then quickly painted into its final state. I did not own an airbrush, so I used spray Magic Marker for the orange to red gradation. I am not certain if this product is available for purchase today, but I may be wrong. This *Follies* pencil sketch is now hanging in our living room in Los Angeles. Of course, the crack is what tells the viewer that this is the end of the Ziegfeld era. All the crack creditors must have wanted a piece of my rather brilliant theater art as their own, I suppose. So, lick my crack, fellas!

RVG: [*laughs*] Right on. In your experience, when something works well, does it just fall into place quickly?

DEB: Sometimes it's just there, like it's coming *through* you rather than coming from outside, or from the great artist in the sky, or even the mighty Zeus! That sounds corny and cliché, but you're so jazzed it seems like you're channeling the concept from the ether. Also, a good number of powerful hormones are generated as this happens, which makes it like good sex, as it were.

RVG: Like you did with the Hendrix and other rock posters, you just left a spot for the credits at the bottom. It seems like you were consciously separating the credit type from the art itself.

DEB: Yes, separating the credit type from the art wasn't done a lot then. Even today all the credits must be calculated in size percentages of the title. Then you end up with *Carol* over *Channing* over *Hello* over *Dolly*, and that's it! That was some producer's idea of a perfect poster—all giant type with tiny or no art. But don't get me wrong, there are a plethora of brilliant posters that are strictly typographic.

RVG: Did they give you percentage sizes?

DEB: Yes, but I just made it clear to them that all the credit type was going to go in the space underneath the cracked face, and it was there that all the percentages would apply.

RVG: It’s brilliant how you incorporated the title treatment into the headdress, dodging all the percentage bullshit.

DEB: That was what I thought was wrong with many Broadway posters in 1970. There was no art, they were all type, due to the “percentages.” They would do things like “HELLO, LOVE!” and then there would be a little guy jumping out of the “o” in “Hello,” and a girl jumping out of the “o” in “Love” with hearts floating about. Then all the credits would be percentages of the “HELLO, LOVE!” art. That was it; that was the art. I mean, it’s rather fucking stupid to a poster designer. I believe I was part of changing the way posters were conceived, credit-wise, as well as the use of the big, smashing image you could see from across the street.

RVG: How much did you get paid for this poster?

DEB: My usual five hundred dollars.

RVG: At the time, did you have a sense of how popular this would become?

DEB: Well, I showed it to my friend, who was the art director of Lincoln Center Stage, and she said, “Oh my God, this is scary, it’s so good! How did you get away with this?” Everybody was saying that. But I did get away with something—I was a somewhat naive artist from nowhere who stumbled into a great image. Shortly after this, I got a call from Broadway producer Edgar Lansbury, who was Angela’s younger brother, and his partner, Joe Beruh. They were doing a new musical based on the Gospel of St. Matthew, and that became the poster for *Godspell*.

RVG: The musical *Godspell* came out of Carnegie Tech, where you went to school. Start me with the Carnegie side. Did you have any exposure to *Godspell* at school, or was it only in New York where you heard about it?

DEB: When *Godspell* appeared at Tech, I was pretty much gone. But yes, the play has lots of connections to the school. An early version of *Godspell* was a senior-class play in the drama department. I also didn’t realize that

Edgar Lansbury had gone out to Carnegie to see the show, and that's when he put an option on the show. I don't know that for a fact, but that's what I heard, and I think it's mostly true. Stephen Schwartz, who wrote the famous score, went to Carnegie, but he was a few years behind me. I did see him at some drunken weekend parties, but I really didn't get to know him.

RVG: I guess the actor Charles Haid, another Carnegie guy, helped bring it to New York.

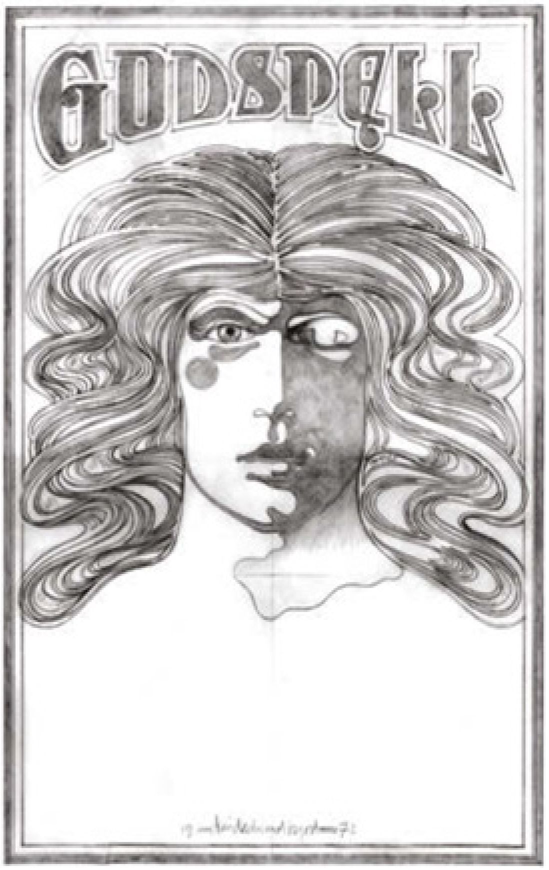
DEB: Who later worked with Steven Bochco, yet another Carnegie alumnus. Bochco, I once saw him on the subway, and we were chatting. Then, when he went to get off the train, he said, "I'm moving to Los Angeles to work at Universal" or wherever, one of the major studios. And of course, in short order, he became Mr. *Hill Street Blues*.

RVG: Did you know Edgar Lansbury?

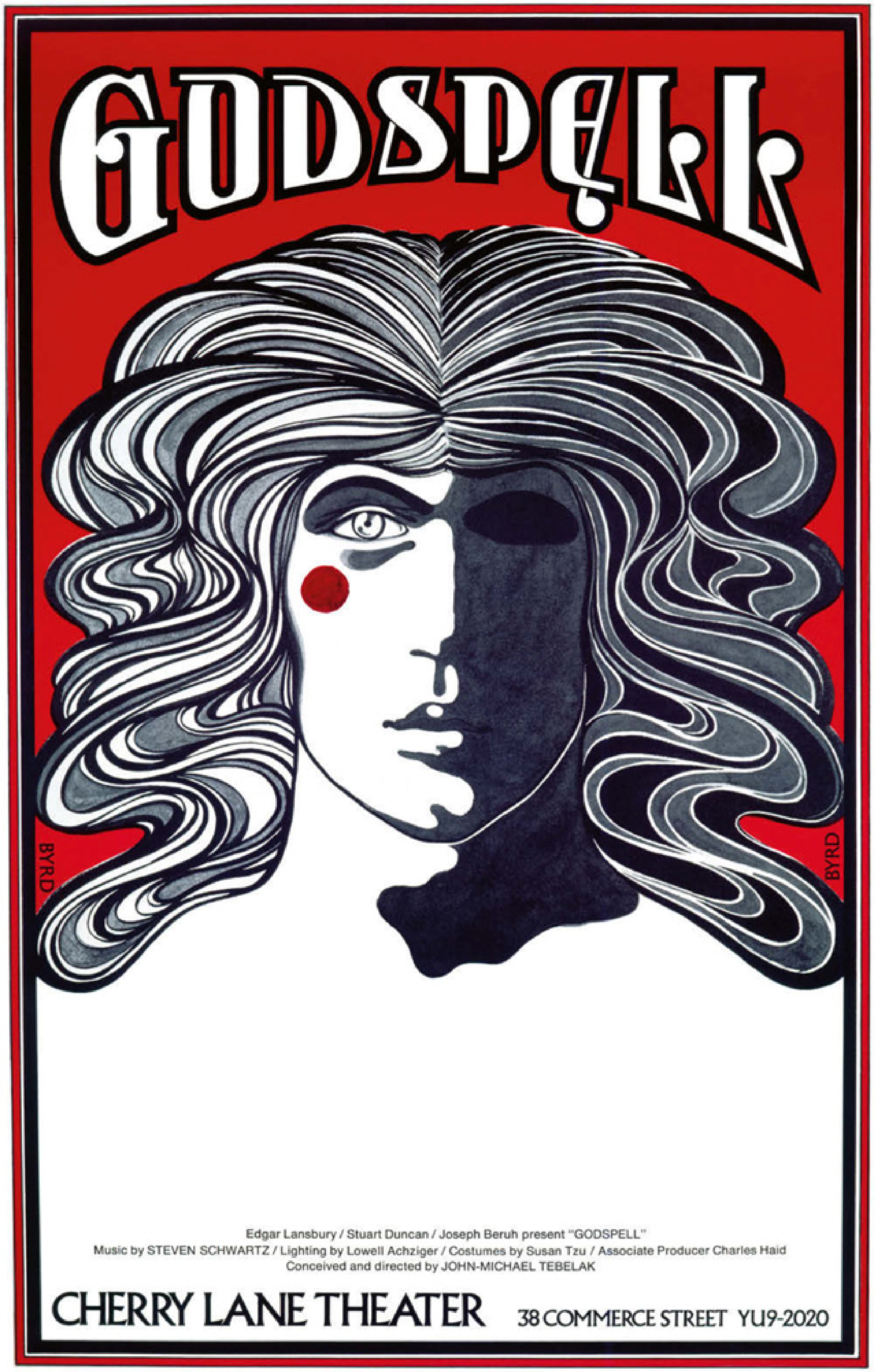
DEB: Well, I didn't know him; he knew me. I mean, he called me. He wanted me to come to his office. His office was in the Winter Garden Theatre building, which also had theatrical offices. I went to his office on the third floor, and he said, "First, I want you to go to the window, stick your head out, and look to the left."

RVG: Huh? What did you think when he said that?

DEB: I didn't know what he was doing. So I did what he asked, and there was my huge *Follies* poster on the marquee of the Winter Garden. Then he said, "I want that poster, and I want it to be Jesus." I immediately thought, *Oh fuck, Son of* Follies. *This is not good*. But then I thought, *Well, it could be good. You never know*. So he said, "I only have a hundred dollars." I said, "I'll do it for a hundred, if you can give me fifty dollars every month that it runs." He said, "I'll do that," and I made some good money off that lovely hit show. It ran for eight years.



Byrd's 1971 concept sketch for Godspell *featured a visible left eye, which Byrd decided to darken over for the final poster. At the time, he felt that the white eye popping out just did not look right*.



Edgar Lansbury / Stuart Duncan / Joseph Beruh present "GODSPELL"
Music by STEVEN SCHWARTZ / Lighting by Lowell Achziger / Costumes by Susan Tzu / Associate Producer Charles Haid
Conceived and directed by JOHN-MICHAEL TEBELAK

CHERRY LANE THEATER 38 COMMERCE STREET YU9-2020

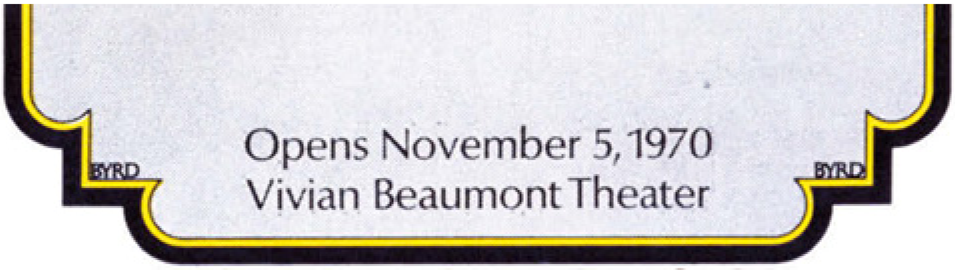
This is the final poster for the 1971 opening production of Godspell *at the off-Broadway Cherry Lane Theatre.*

The Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center
under the direction of Jules Irving

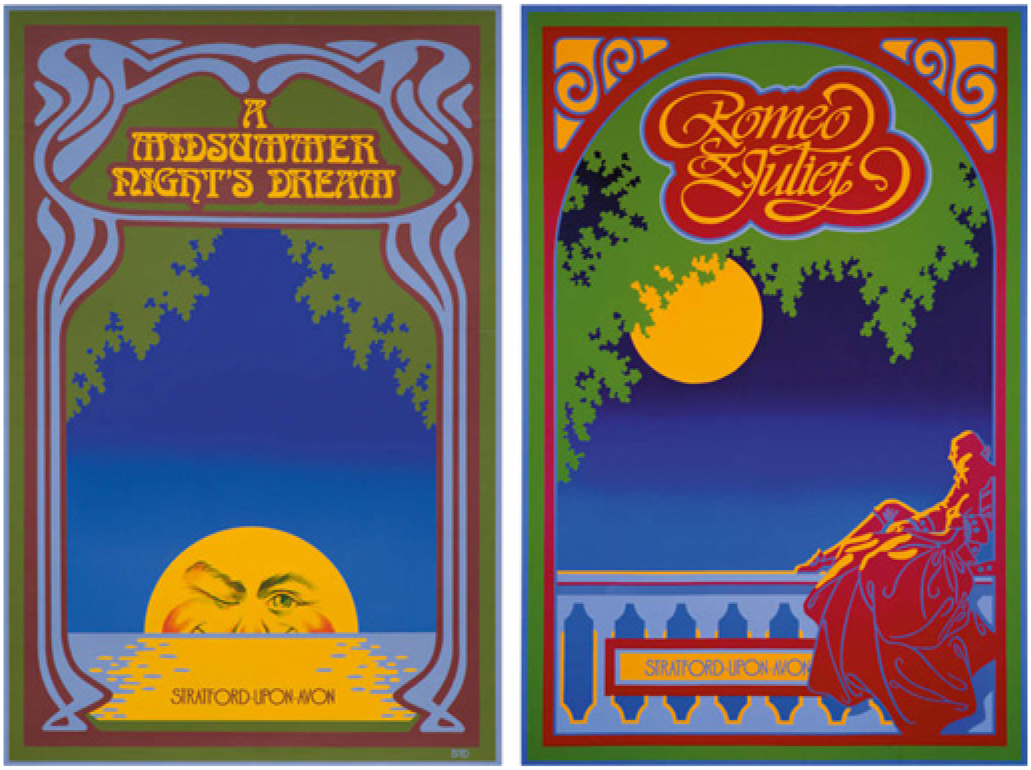
Bertolt Brecht's

The Good Woman of Setzuan

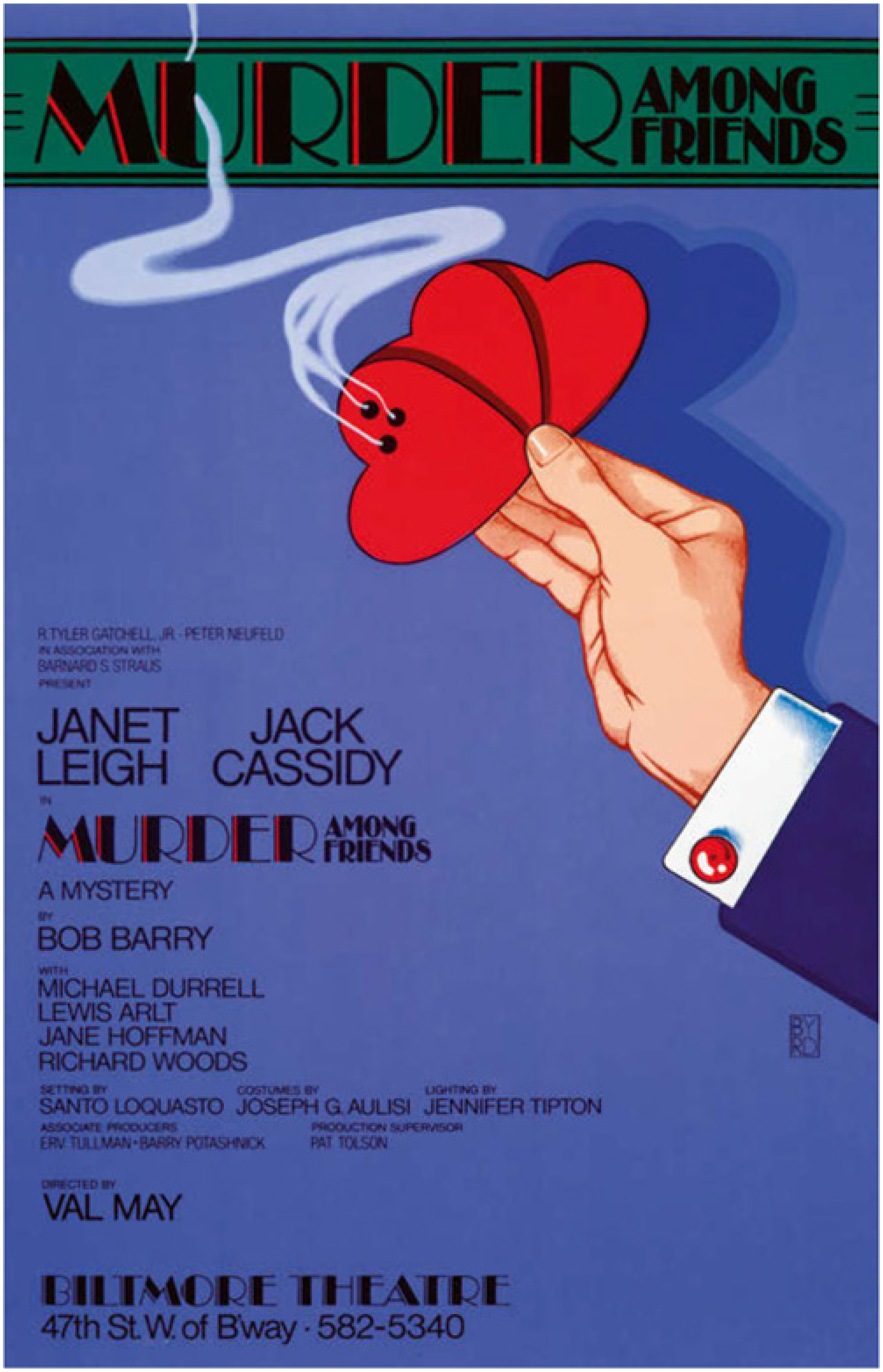
In A New Translation By Ralph Mannheim


Opens November 5, 1970
Vivian Beaumont Theater
BYRD
BYRD

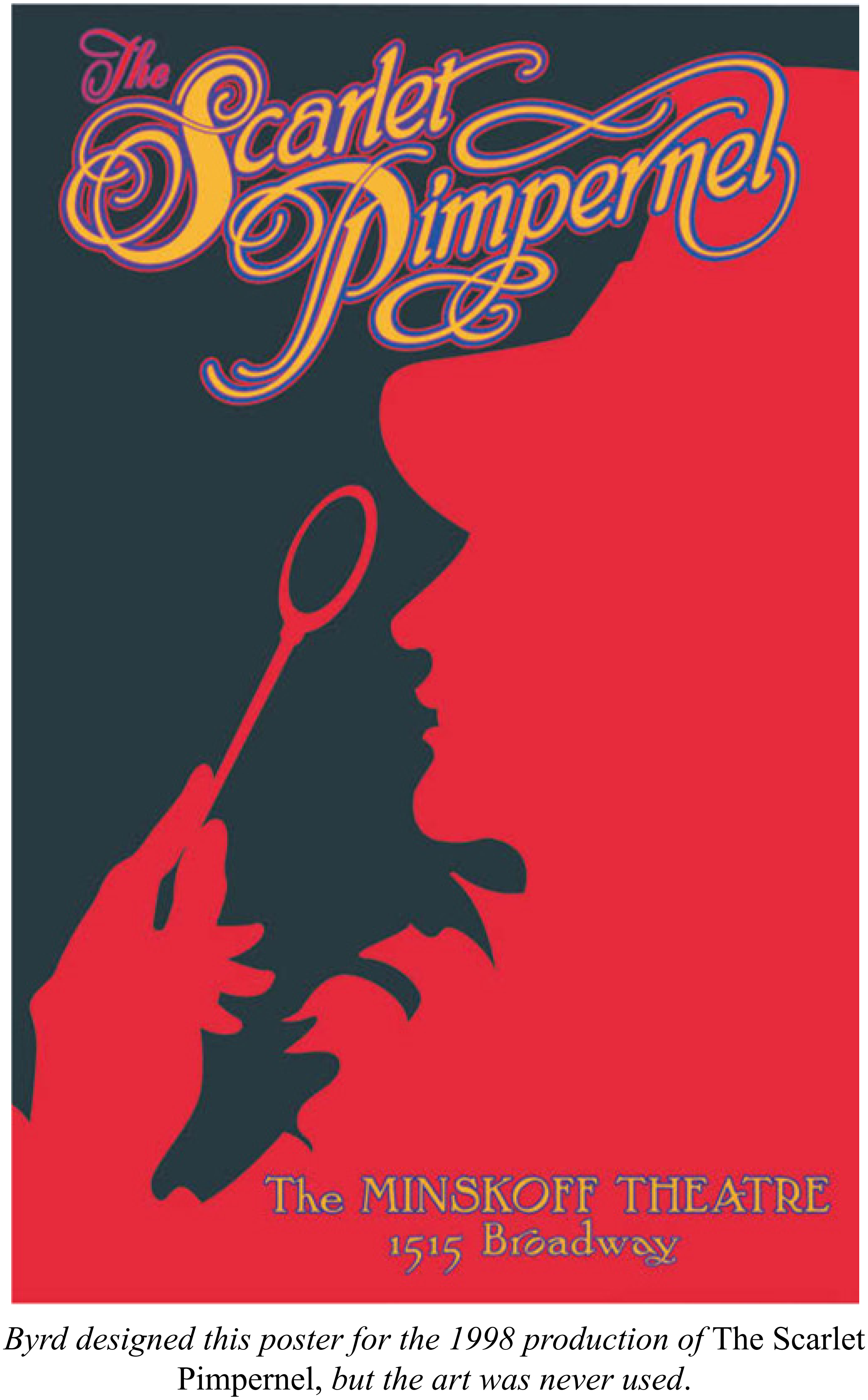
Byrd's poster for the 1970 production of Bertolt Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuan, *by theRepertory Theater of Lincoln Center, was deliberately sparse. He designed the title type "to be like a cloud that the plane flew under." Byrd remembers appreciating the design at the time, hating it for many years after, and coming full circle to love it again*.


A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON
BYRD
Romeo & Juliet
STRATFORD-UPON-AVO

Byrd's 1972 concept designs for the Royal Shakespeare Company's performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream *and* Romeo and Juliet *were never used, as the productions were canceled.*


MURDER AMONG FRIENDS
R. TYLER GATCHELL, JR. - PETER NEUFELD
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
BARNARD S. STRAUS
PRESENT
JANET LEIGH
JACK CASSIDY
IN
MURDER AMONG FRIENDS
A MYSTERY
BY
BOB BARRY
WITH
MICHAEL DURRELL
LEWIS ARLT
JANE HOFFMAN
RICHARD WOODS
SETTING BY
SANTO LOQUASTO
COSTUMES BY
JOSEPH G. AULISI
LIGHTING BY
JENNIFER TIPTON
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS
ERV TULLMAN • BARRY POTASHNICK
PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
PAT TOLSON
DIRECTED BY
VAL MAY
BILTMORE THEATRE
47th St. W. of B'way · 582-5340
BYRD

Byrd created this poster for the 1975 Broadway production of Murder Among Friends, *which was Janet Leigh's stage debut and Jack Cassidy's final Broadway performance.*


The Scarlet Pimpernel
The MINSKOFF THEATRE
1515 Broadway

Byrd designed this poster for the 1998 production of The Scarlet Pimpernel, *but the art was never used*.

RVG: When you say, “Oh fuck, Son of *Follies*,” what were you worried about? What was your concern?

DEB: Well, that it would look too much like *Follies*. Then I thought, *What the hell? So what?* You know, it could be someone else copying me. ’Cause even though I knew I was copying myself, it seemed to me to be too similar to *Follies*. And then I realized, no, it’ll be its own thing. So I went home, and it took me about two days to complete the art.

RVG: Aside from “I want this, but I want it to be Jesus,” do you remember anything else about the direction they gave you?

DEB: Also, something about Jesus being a mime, because I consciously put a little red dot on his face, which I believe I took from the cast photo of the lead actor.

RVG: For those of us who don’t live in the world of mimes, how was the red dot mime-ish?

DEB: Well, sometimes mimes put a little red dot on their nose, or their lips would be red, or they would have the red-dot cheeks, you know, and it was mime-time. It was cool for a while in the seventies, and then later it became very not cool—something to parody or spoof.

RVG: When you showed this to Lansbury for the first time, did you show him the pencil, or did you show it fully done?

DEB: I showed the pencil. And he said, “Fantastic.”

RVG: Any changes, any comments?

DEB: No, none. They didn’t make any changes. In the sketch, I was going to show the other eye, but then I decided not to, to just make it darker.

RVG: Did it continually surprise you that you would turn in these sketches, and they wouldn’t have voluminous amounts of changes?

DEB: No, because I had other jobs where there were tons of changes. There were also horrible things I had to talk people out of. You can talk clients out of things if you really know how. Sometimes I succeeded at this, sometimes not, much to my chagrin.

RVG: Frank Verlizzo, the legendary Broadway art director and your student from Pratt, told me all about his strategies for presenting work to clients. Did you feel that you were pretty good at discussing the artwork and presenting it in an effective way?

DEB: Well, that's a good question. I think I could do that sometimes, more often as I grew into dealing with clients. I think I was a good salesman eventually, though I didn't like it. You know, you have to defend things. It is rather confrontational, and I'm basically not an argumentative type of person. But the client is king, and they are hiring you to be brilliant in the crapshoot world of the legitimate theater. Not a good place to wear your talent on your sleeve, so to speak.

RVG: *Godspell* was a big hit at the time, right?

DEB: It opened downtown at the Cherry Lane, a small off-Broadway theater. I felt that venue was particularly well suited for the revue-style intimacy of this hippie play with its sing-along Aquarian simplicity. But success has its own engine, which means moving to Broadway and theaters not meant for such an intimate piece. It ran for eight years. That's significant because, remember, I got fifty dollars a month for the run of the play.

RVG: Did you go to opening night?

DEB: No, I went to see it when it was in previews at that theater that's on the poster, Cherry Lane. You saw the movie, right?

RVG: I've seen the movie, yes.

DEB: The movie is fluffed up, whereas the original show was kind of simple and small.

RVG: Well, it's kind of like what they did to *Jesus Christ Superstar*, right? Once it went to Hollywood, it exploded.

DEB: They Hollywoodized it. And it's weird that I worked on both of those shows, because I don't have any special contact with Jesus or his agent. [*laughs*]

RVG: Did you think this would be the cultural touchstone that it became?

DEB: No, I had no idea that would happen. I thought it was a very fun show. You know, it caught the fancy of the public. But I know that Stephen Schwartz, who composed the show, never liked my poster image.

RVG: He didn't?

DEB: He thought it was too somber, too serious. He wanted something like the guy jumping out of the "O" [makes jazz hands]. I think he wanted the figure of Jesus with the suspenders and his hands up singing, "La-Di-Da, Jesus!" or something. In the end, I liked Stephen Schwartz and was happy to be part of his early success, and this is one of the most famous images in the Western Hemisphere, and *Godspell* has been performed in every high school in North, Central, and South America, at least.

RVG: Do you think your striking image contributed to the success of the show?

DEB: For years I didn't even show this in my portfolio 'cause I thought it was dumb. But then I realized, no, this is not dumb; this is smart! I was thinking that these complex shows like *Jesus Christ Superstar* were what I should be doing, and this *Godspell* poster was too simple. But it's not true. Simplicity is what made it last through all these years.

RVG: Any last thoughts on this?

DEB: Well, *Godspell* is now all over the world, translated into different languages. So this musical show, and the word "Godspell" were like, kaboom! The poster was and still is very good art! Now, in my old age, I realize how good it is.

RVG: This is not the only poster where you initially said, "It wasn't in my portfolio; I didn't think it was good," and then you reassessed it. Do you think all artists who have a long career go through that?

DEB: Hmmm. I don't know. That's not the kind of thing you can know, is it? I've never talked about that with anyone until now. I think it was because my self-esteem was so shitty.

RVG: Toward the end of the seventies?

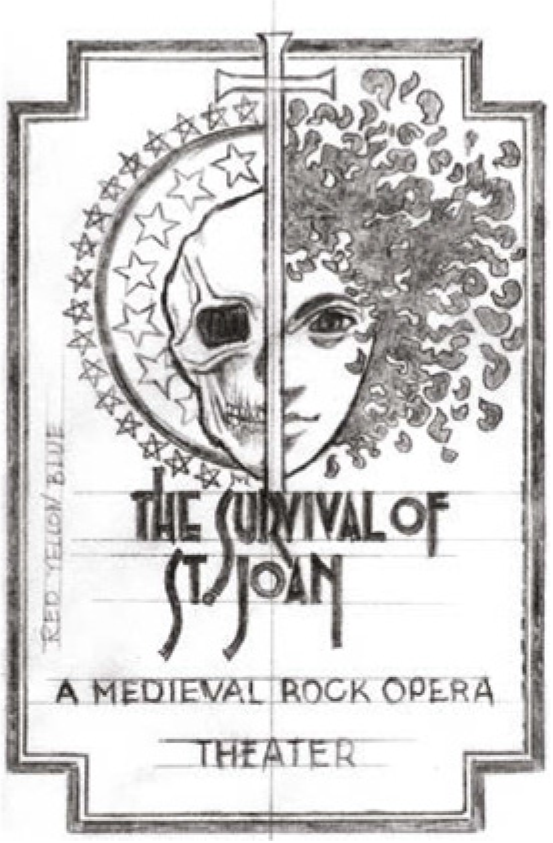
DEB: Oh yeah, god. It was really bad time for me. One thing I do remember, I didn't know that John Lennon had been shot. I didn't hear about it for many months. I mean, that's how drunk, stoned, and out of it I was.

RVG: What other of your Broadway posters do you like?

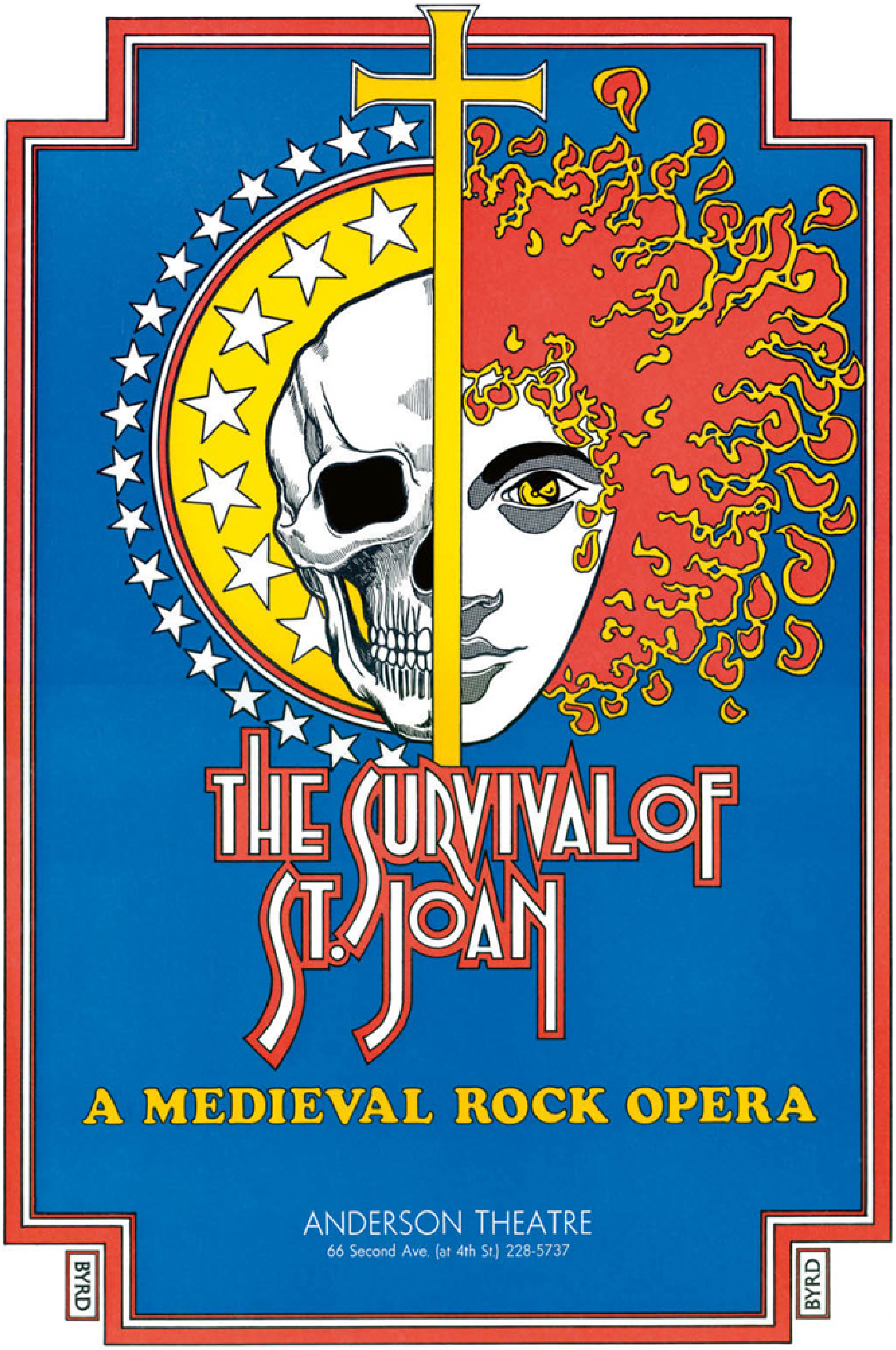
DEB: The poster I did for *The Robber Bridegroom* in 1976 is one of my personal favorites. When John Houseman called me to ask for a sketch for this new musical based on a novella by the great southern writer Eudora Welty, he had already been through a number of artists but had always wanted me to give it a try. I read both the novella and the Alfred Uhry script, and being from the South, I took to this mythical Mississippi scamp immediately. I recall that at the opening, star Barry Bostwick had broken his leg and gave a marvelous performance using his big plaster cast as a constant piece of business to great effect. As I recall, the sketch was done in my bathing suit while sunbathing at Jones Beach in Brooklyn, my thirst slaked by a thermos of margaritas. [*laughs*]

RVG: Very cool. Others?

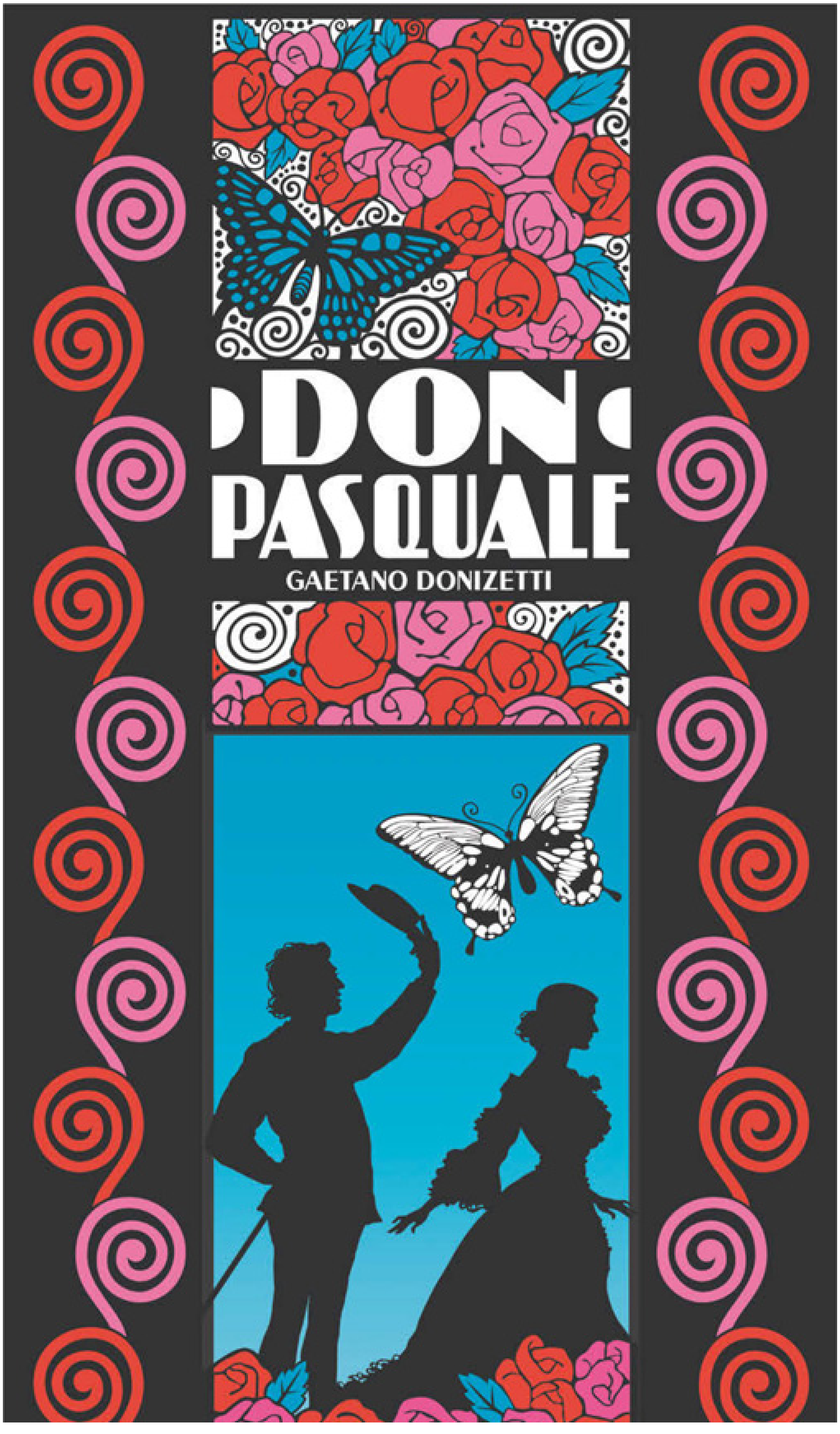
DEB: Before there was *Godspell*, I did *The Survival of St. Joan*, a musical based on the mythical rumor that Joan of Arc had survived the stake. It was produced by Haila Stoddard, a soap opera star for twenty years—as a producer, she was very fearful of the skull imagery—and starred Gretchen Corbett as Joan, an art schoolmate from Carnegie Tech, who went on to be Jim Rockford's attorney in the long-running *The Rockford Files*. This is considered one of the first rock operas. All I can remember about this show was St. Joan's spectacular ascendancy into heaven with much guitar feedback, strobe lights, and stage smoke.


THE SURVIVAL OF ST. JOAN
A MEDIEVAL ROCK OPERA
THEATER
RED YELLOW BLUE

This pencil concept sketch was created for the 1971 off-Broadway production of the rock opera The Survival of St. Joan.

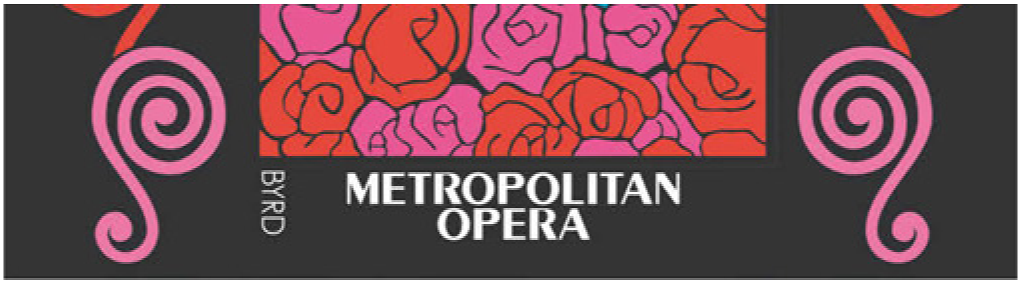

THE SURVIVAL OF ST. JOAN
A MEDIEVAL ROCK OPERA
ANDERSON THEATRE
66 Second Ave. (at 4th St.) 228-5737
BYRD
BYRD

This is the final poster for The Survival of St. Joan. *Byrd had to talk producer Haila Stoddard out of getting rid of the skull. She suggested an image featuring a man leaning against a cross,* *playing a guitar, a design Byrd later described as "horrid." The production featured actress Gretchen Corbett, a good friend of Byrd's from Carnegie Tech.*



DON PASQUALE

GAETANO DONIZETTI

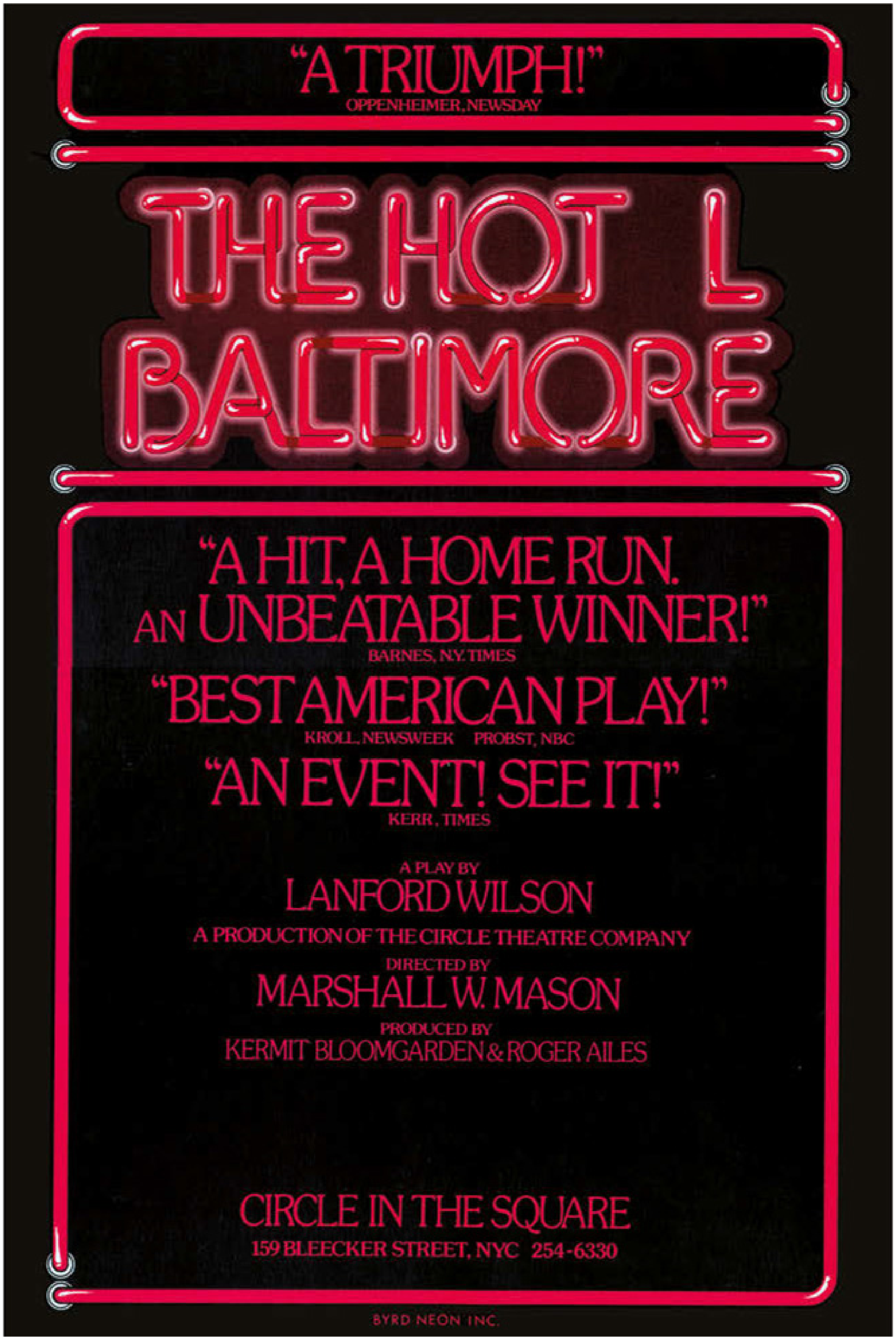


Byrd designed this poster for the opera Don Pasquale *at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. The performance was the final Met appearance for the great American soprano Beverly Sills. Byrd's original design had hearts where the spirals are, but the producer John Dexter "hated" hearts. Byrd later commented, "The spirals are far superior to the hearts. John Dexter was right!"*

MEMOIR
Byrd
by John Murrell

Guelph Spring Theatre Festival • Ontario

The 1978 poster for the play Memoir, *about the final year of Sarah Bernhardt's life, which opened in Ontario, Canada, was inspired by the famous drawings of Bernhardt by the Czech artist Alphonse Mucha*.



"A TRIUMPH!"
OPPENHEIMER, NEWSDAY

THE HOT L
BALTIMORE

"A HIT, A HOME RUN.
AN UNBEATABLE WINNER!"
BARNES, N.Y. TIMES

"BEST AMERICAN PLAY!"
KROLL, NEWSWEEK PROBST, NBC

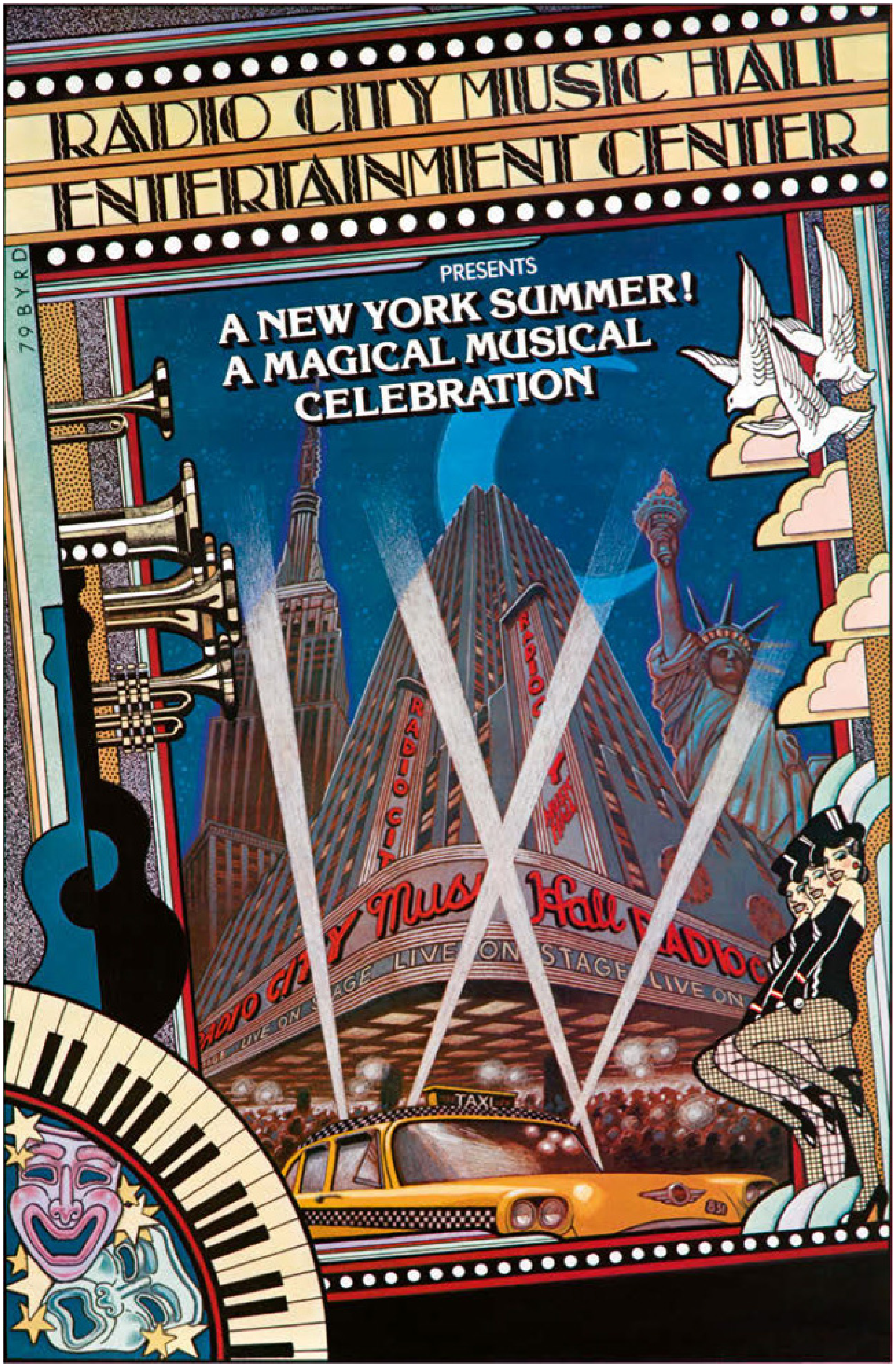
"AN EVENT! SEE IT!"
KERR, TIMES

A PLAY BY
LANFORD WILSON
A PRODUCTION OF THE CIRCLE THEATRE COMPANY
DIRECTED BY
MARSHALL W. MASON
PRODUCED BY
KERMIT BLOOMGARDEN & ROGER AILES

CIRCLE IN THE SQUARE
159 BLEECKER STREET, NYC 254-6330

BYRD NEON INC.

Byrd designed this poster for The Hot L Baltimore, *another Lanford Wilson play, which ran for over 1,000 performances and* *won the 1973 New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best American Play*.


RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
ENTERTAINMENT CENTER
PRESENTS
A NEW YORK SUMMER!
A MAGICAL MUSICAL
CELEBRATION
79 BYRD
RADIO CITY
RADIO CITY Music Hall RADIO
LIVE ON STAGE LIVE ON STAGE LIVE ON
TAXI

Byrd created this 1979 poster for A New York Summer *at the newly remodeled Radio City Music Hall.*

RVG: Speaking of guitars and heaven, you did a one-off poster for *Jesus Christ Superstar*, right?

DEB: *Superstar*? Yes, I think I did it after *Godspell*. It was an in-store promo for Decca Records. I decided to expand on the original album cover, which had a simple illustration of golden angels. I know the guy who created the angels logo, Ernie Cefalu, and he's still alive and creating. We once appeared together in a group show here in Los Angeles. Do you remember that *Jesus Christ Superstar* album cover with the gold angels on the brown background?

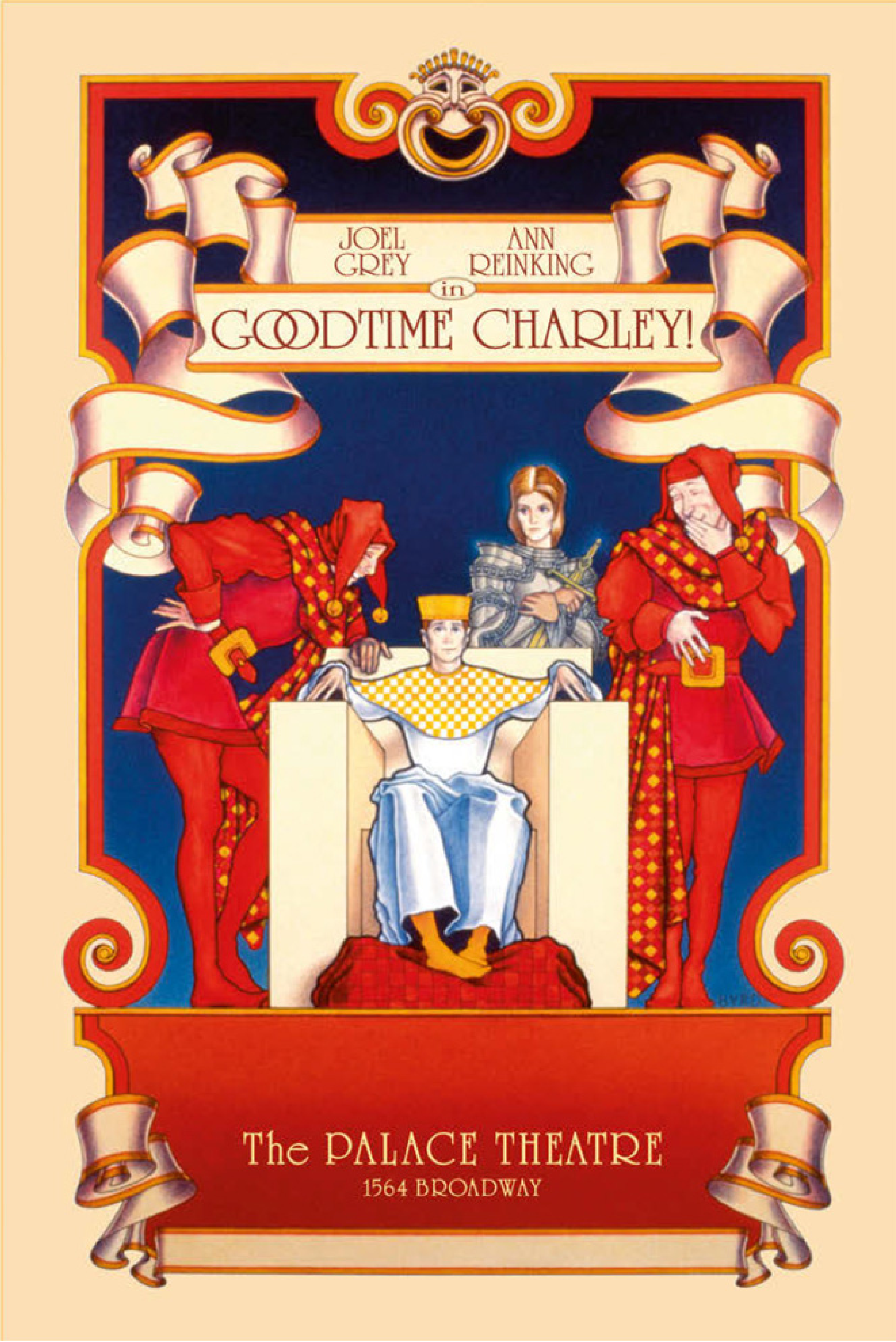
RVG: For sure. I always thought that original album cover was brilliant because it was so simple.

DEB: I agree! That's all you need. Ernie and I discussed this at the Forest Lawn Museum exhibit.

RVG: What's with you and messianic figures? First *Godspell*, then *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and your royal Busby Berkeley scene for your *Tommy* at the Metropolitan Opera poster.

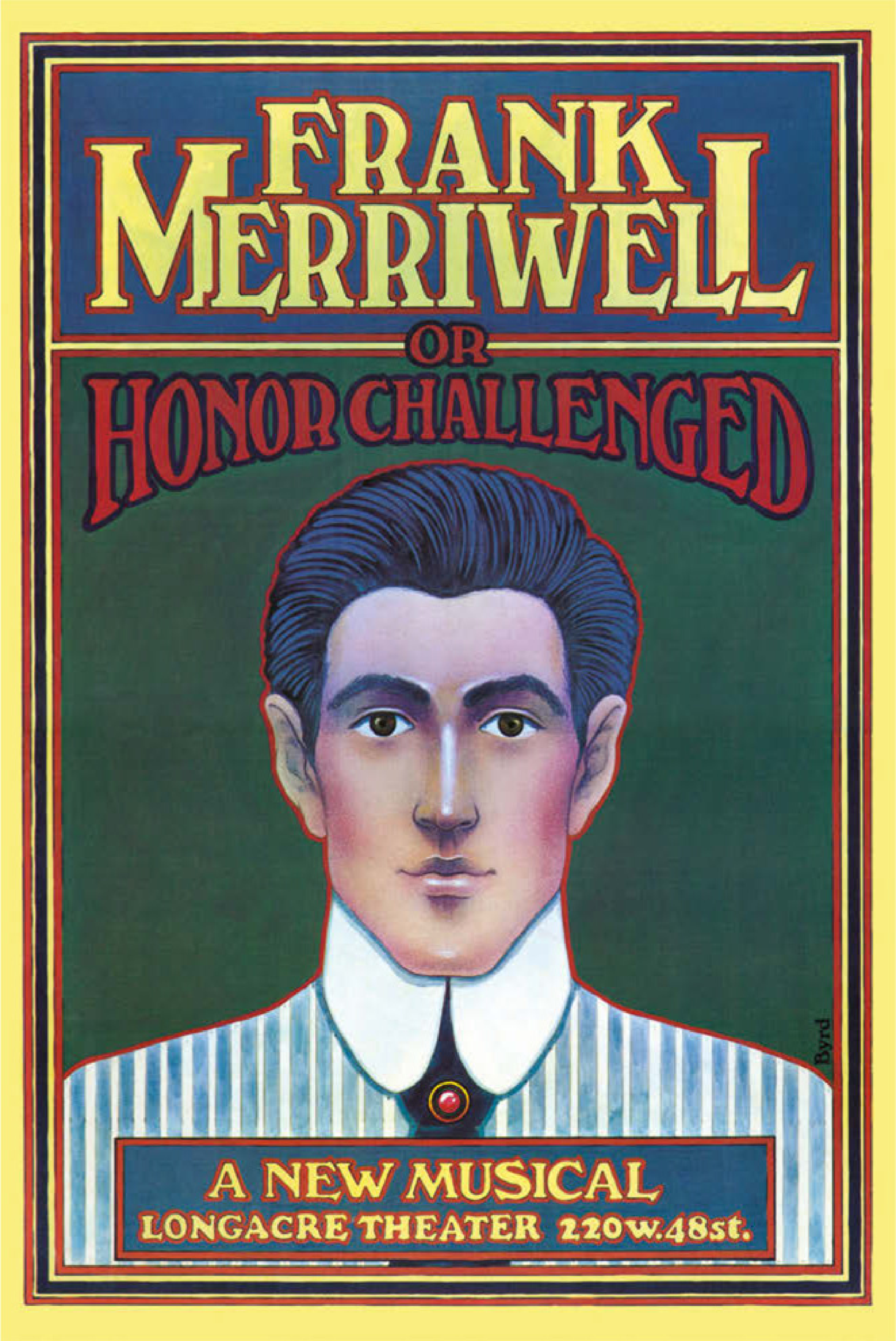
DEB: With the messianic boy-king, right. Also, don't forget my college fascination with Pope Pius XII. When I was doing these designs, I would go to religious stores and buy lots of prayer cards of Jesus. Really devout Catholics have all these little statues and cards. You know, you're there drawing and drawing, and your mind goes everywhere. When I did these quasi-religious designs, for some reason I always thought of this lady named Rosie that I used to know in Pittsburgh. When I was in college, I hung out at the Holiday Bar. That was Pittsburgh's oldest gay bar, which sadly closed in 2007 when Carnegie Mellon purchased the building. There was a big mural in the bar that became famous because everyone thought Andy Warhol, who was also a Carnegie alum, had painted it. But it was actually me! Anyway, every Sunday, I would be there getting rid of my Saturday-night hangover—and Rosie would come in. She was a little

Catholic lady with a scarf on her head. She came softly in the door and would slam the bar with the palm of her hand and yell, “Decorate the mahogany!” and I never forgot that. This is for Rosie. [*laughs*] “Decorate the fuckin’ mahogany!” I think of Rosie all the time. Oh boy, she was just a once-in-a-lifetime gal.


JOEL GREY
ANN REINKING
in
GOODTIME CHARLEY!
BYRD
The PALACE THEATRE
1564 BROADWAY

This is the second of two posters that Byrd did for Joel Grey musicals. The 1975 production also featured Ann Reinking as

Joan of Arc. For the design, Byrd was, in his words, "Obviously inspired by the art of Maxfield Parrish."


FRANK MERRIWELL
OR
HONOR CHALLENGED
Byrd
A NEW MUSICAL
LONGACRE THEATER 220w.48st.

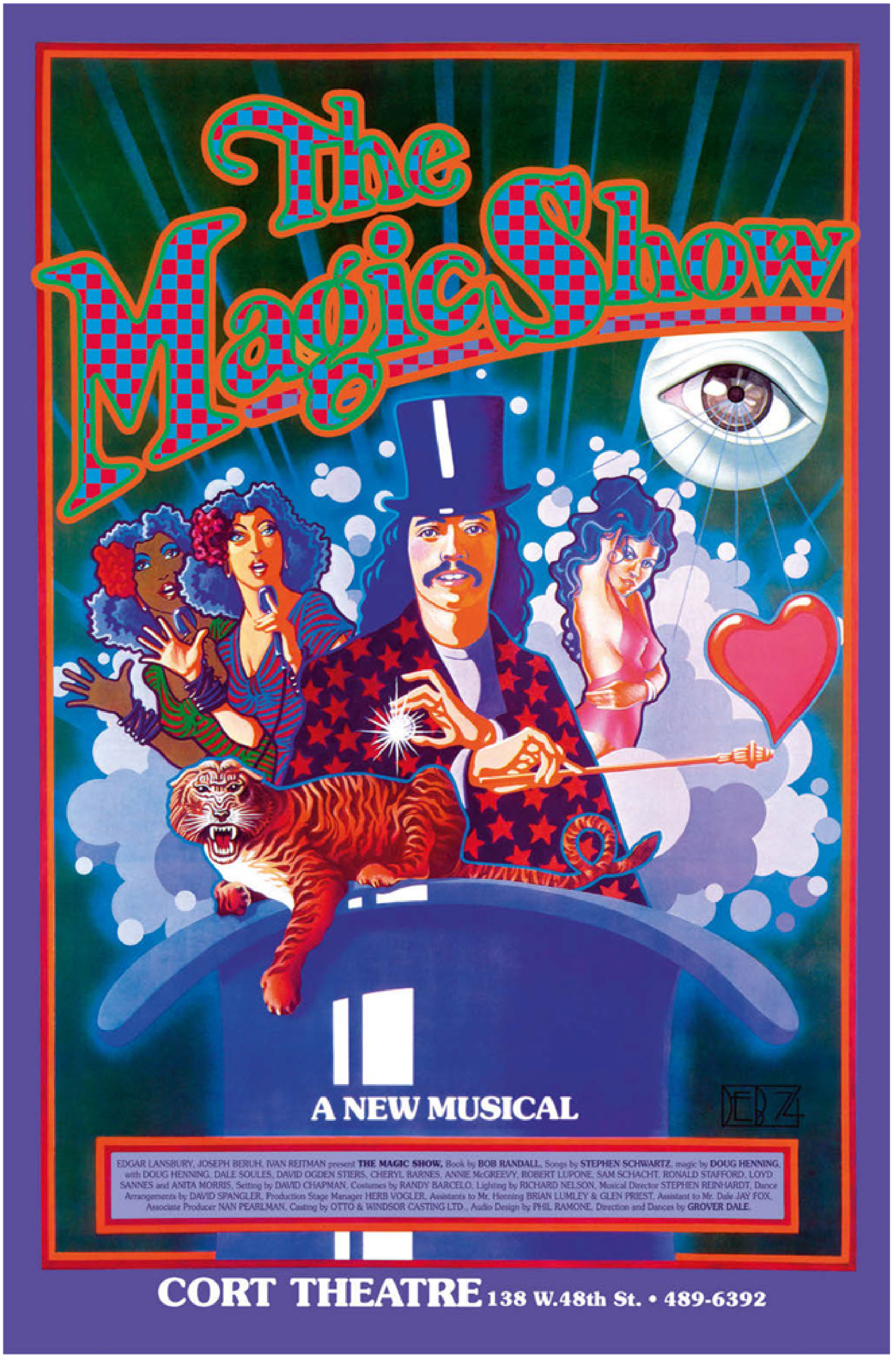
Byrd created this poster for the 1971 Broadway musical Frank Merriwell or Honor Challenged. *The image is Byrd's concept drawing, but the producers loved it so much that they printed it as the final poster. Byrd loved that because it made the piece feel more personal to him*.

RVG: [*laughs*] Back to the posters, these god-like images sure brought you a lot of recognition.

DEB: For sure. Three of my posters were included in 1976 bicentennial poster show at the Smithsonian. *Follies, Jesus Christ Superstar*, and a drawing I did for Elvis's *Aloha from Hawaii via Satellite*. I guess you could say Elvis is another deity. Or a king for sure!

RVG: That's an amazing honor. How did that make you feel?

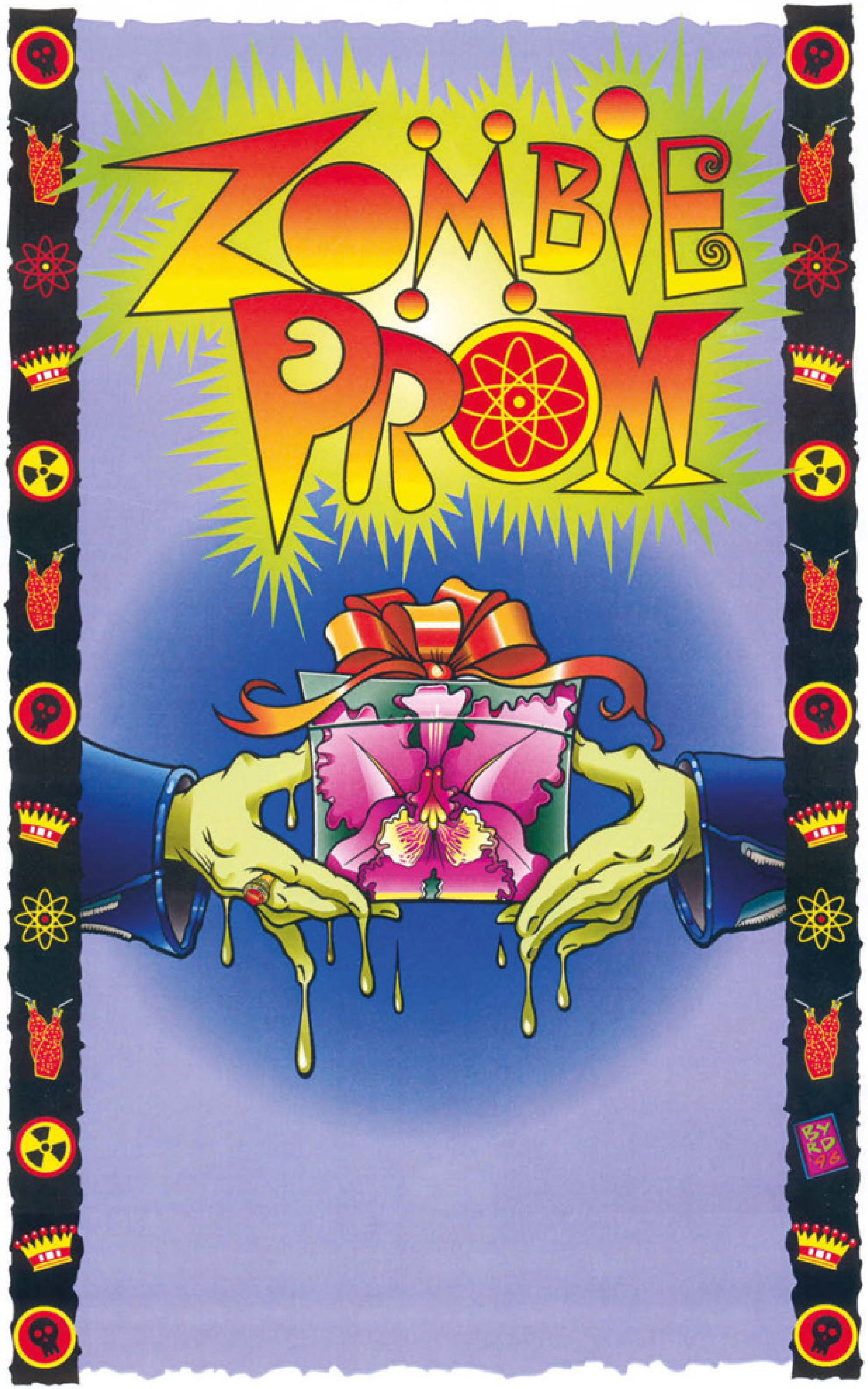
DEB: Well, it was kind of great. My partner Jon and I went to the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, to attend the show, along with his mother. I was in there with Milton Glaser and everybody else of note!



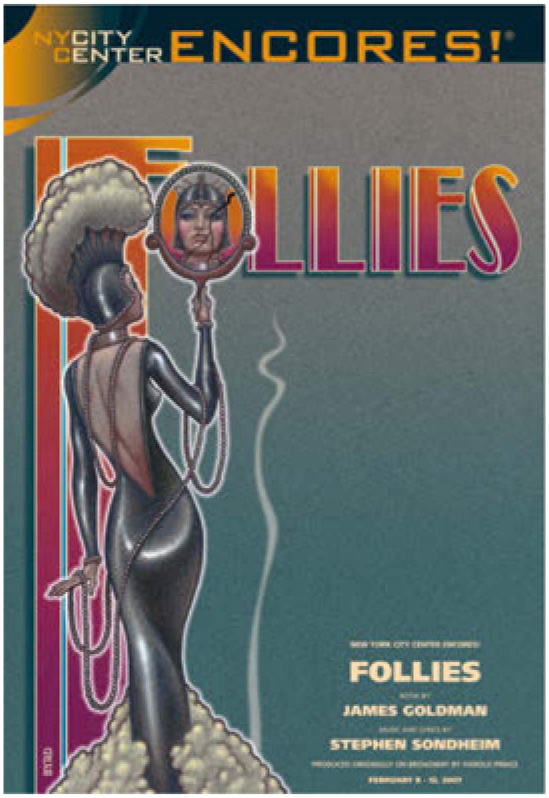
EDGAR LANSBURY, JOSEPH BERUH, IVAN REITMAN present **THE MAGIC SHOW,** Book by **BOB RANDALL,** Songs by **STEPHEN SCHWARTZ,** magic by **DOUG HENNING,** with DOUG HENNING, DALE SOULES, DAVID OGDEN STIERS, CHERYL BARNES, ANNIE McGREEVY, ROBERT LUPONE, SAM SCHACHT, RONALD STAFFORD, LOYD SANNES and ANITA MORRIS, Setting by DAVID CHAPMAN, Costumes by RANDY BARCELO, Lighting by RICHARD NELSON, Musical Director STEPHEN REINHARDT, Dance Arrangements by DAVID SPANGLER, Production Stage Manager HERB VOGLER, Assistants to Mr. Henning BRIAN LUMLEY & GLEN PRIEST, Assistant to Mr. Dale JAY FOX, Associate Producer NAN PEARLMAN, Casting by OTTO & WINDSOR CASTING LTD., Audio Design by PHIL RAMONE, Direction and Dances by **GROVER DALE.**

CORT THEATRE **138 W.48th St. • 489-6392**

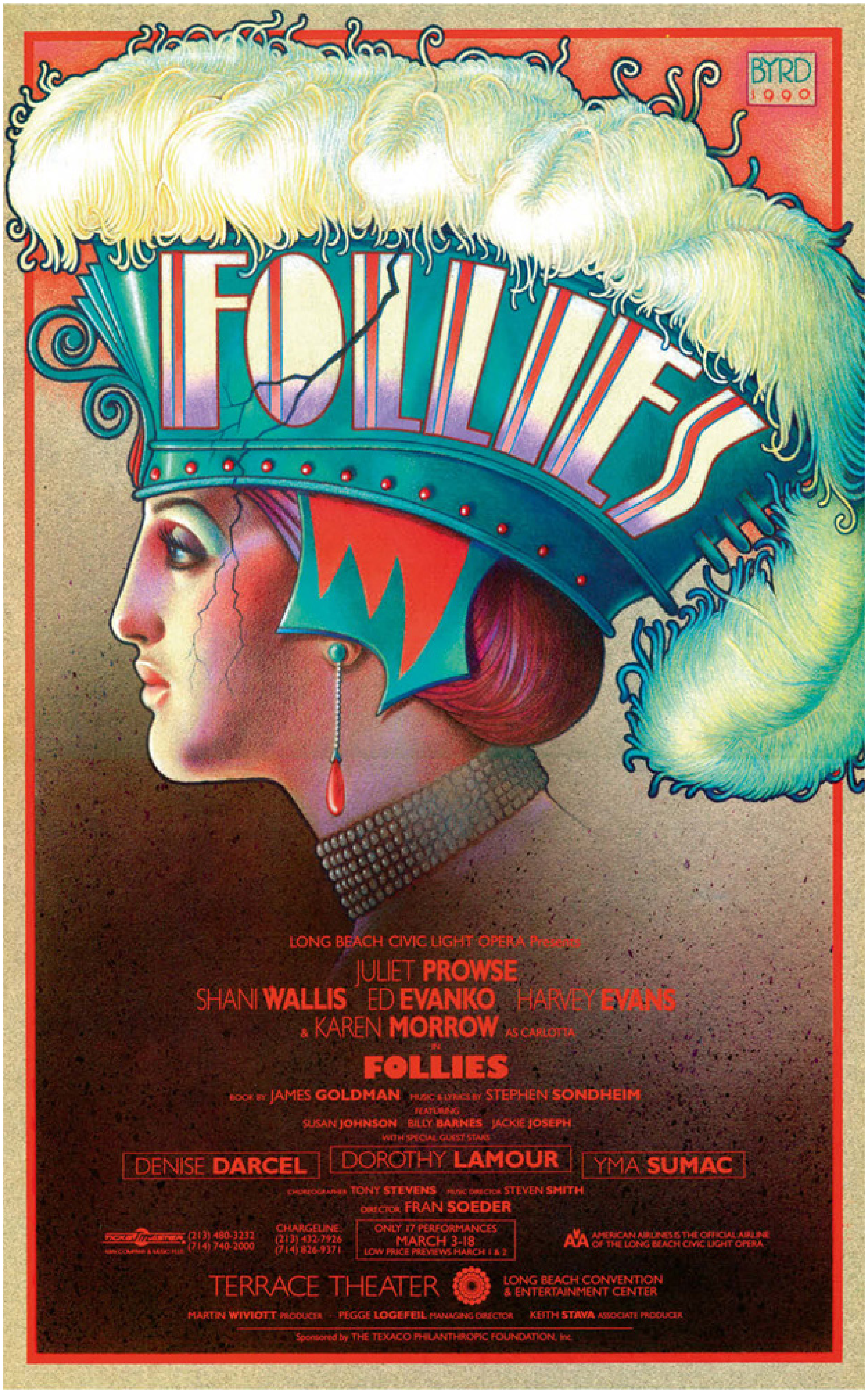
Byrd created this poster in 1974 for The Magic Show, *which starred magician Doug Henning. Another Edgar Lansbury production, this successful musical ran for over 1,900 performances and earned Henning a Tony Award nomination. Byrd recalls going to the theatre to discuss the poster with Henning and lifting up a sheet that was covering something. Henning sternly lectured Byrd on etiquette of a magician's materials, to which Byrd says, "He was completely correct in doing so."*


ZOMBIE
PROM
BYRD '96

This poster was created for the 1996 off-Broadway production of Zombie Prom. *The play revolved around a teenager who jumps into a nuclear reactor, turns into a toxic zombie, but goes to the prom anyway. Byrd loves this design, and it was the first poster he ever produced digitally in Adobe Illustrator. Byrd described the play as "fabulously constructed."*


NY CITY CENTER ENCORES!
FOLLIES
BYRD
FOLLIES
JAMES GOLDMAN
STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Byrd's poster for the 2007 revival of Follies *by City Center Encores was the third and final poster Byrd would design for the musical.*



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& KAREN **MORROW** AS CARLOTTA

IN

FOLLIES

BOOK BY JAMES **GOLDMAN** MUSIC & LYRICS BY STEPHEN **SONDHEIM**

FEATURING

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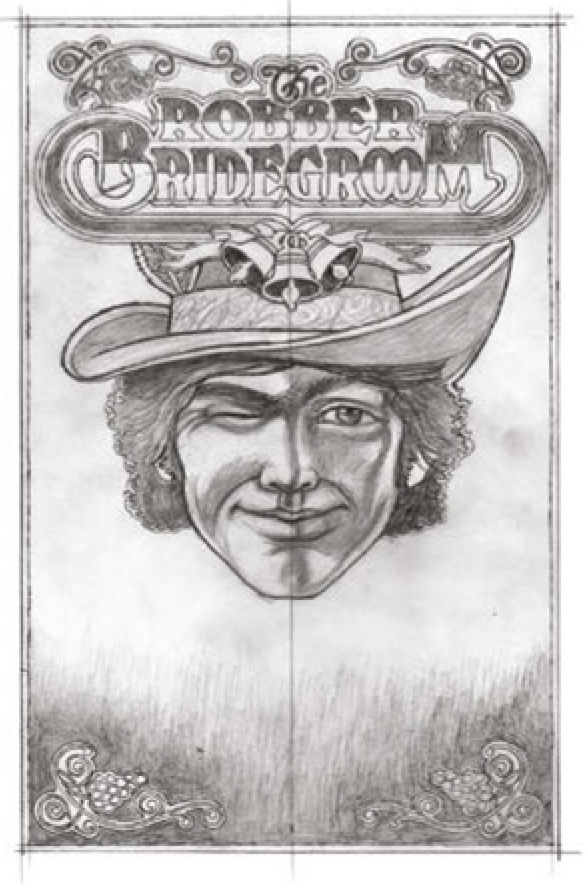
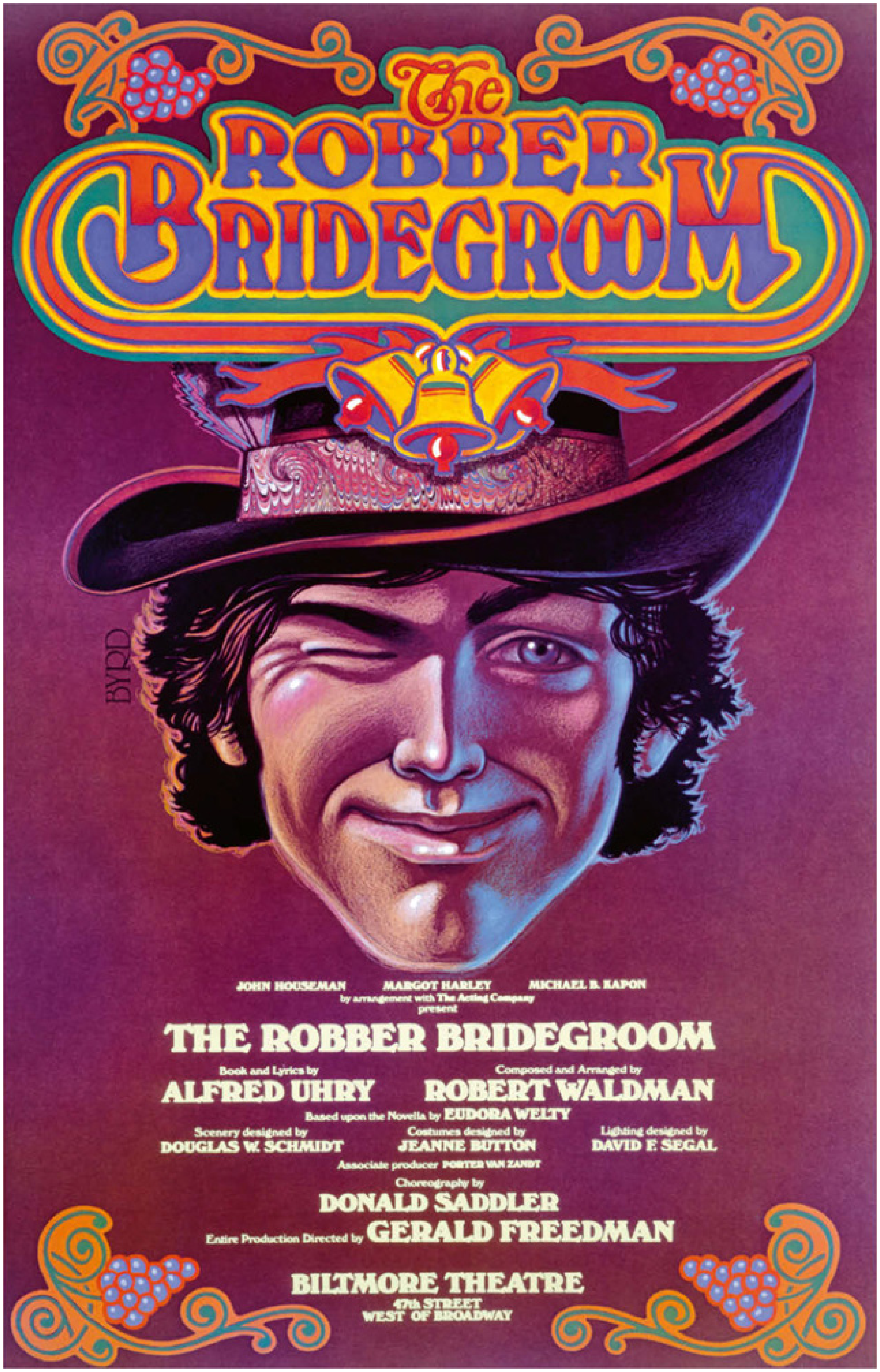
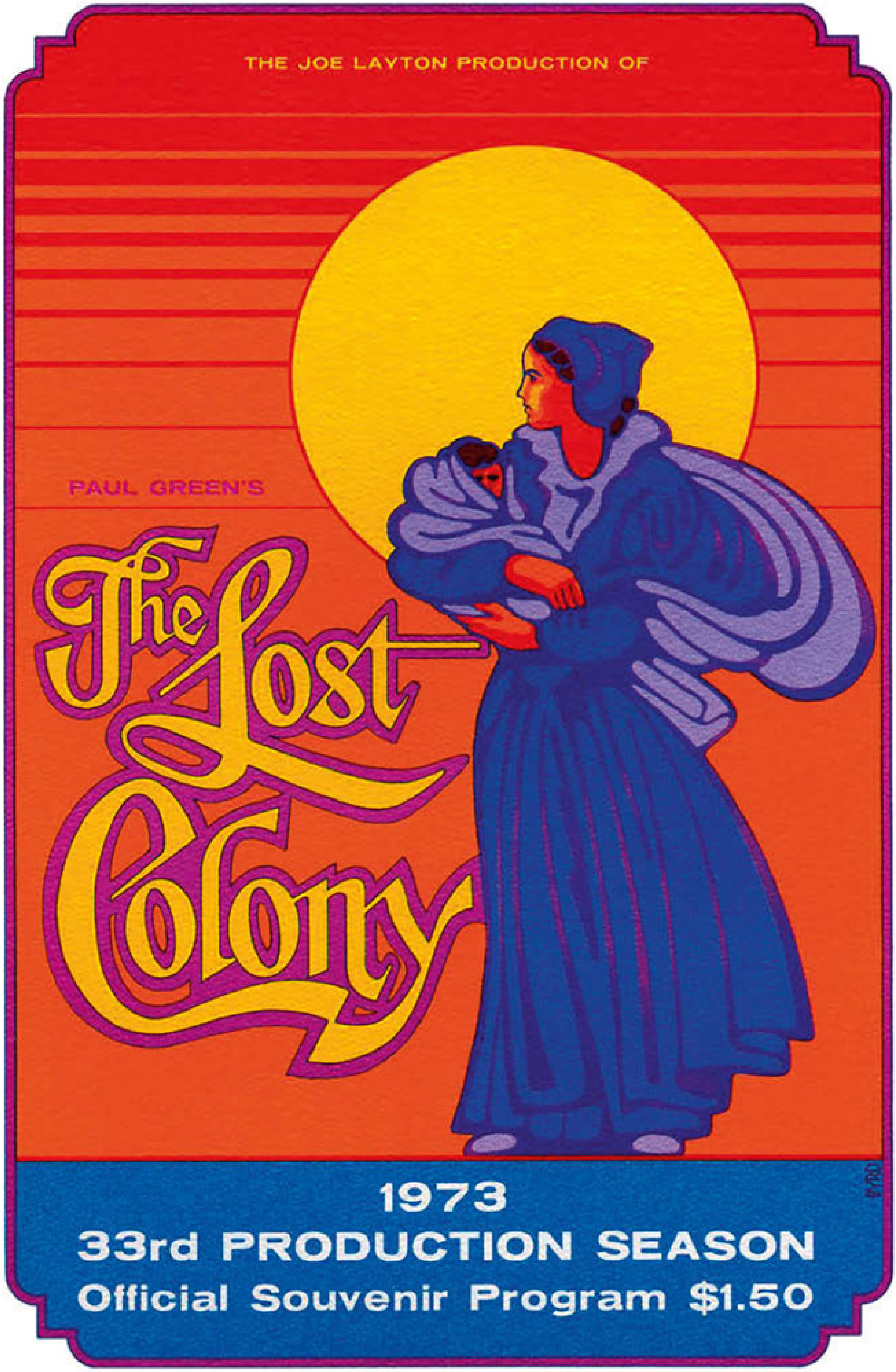
The second of three Byrd produced for the musical Follies, *this poster was for the twentieth anniversary production in 1991. While the original 1971 poster was based on Marlene Dietrich, this design was inspired by the face of Dolores, one of Florenz Ziegfeld's favorite showgirls*.



This concept poster sketch for the 1975 Broadway production of The Robber Bridegroom *was based on a 1942 novella by Eudora Welty, one of Byrd's favorite writers. The musical was produced by John Houseman, who championed Byrd to do the poster. Byrd found Houseman to be a "very lovely, sweet, intelligent person."*


The ROBBER BRIDEGROOM
BYRD
JOHN HOUSEMAN
MARGOT HARLEY
MICHAEL B. KAPON
by arrangement with The Acting Company
present
THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM
Book and Lyrics by
ALFRED UHRY
Composed and Arranged by
ROBERT WALDMAN
Based upon the Novella by EUDORA WELTY
Scenery designed by
DOUGLAS W. SCHMIDT
Costumes designed by
JEANNE BUTTON
Lighting designed by
DAVID F. SEGAL
Associate producer PORTER VAN ZANDT
Choreography by
DONALD SADDLER
Entire Production Directed by GERALD FREEDMAN
BILTMORE THEATRE
47th STREET
WEST OF BROADWAY

Final Broadway poster for The Robber Bridegroom, *1975*



THE JOE LAYTON PRODUCTION OF

PAUL GREEN'S

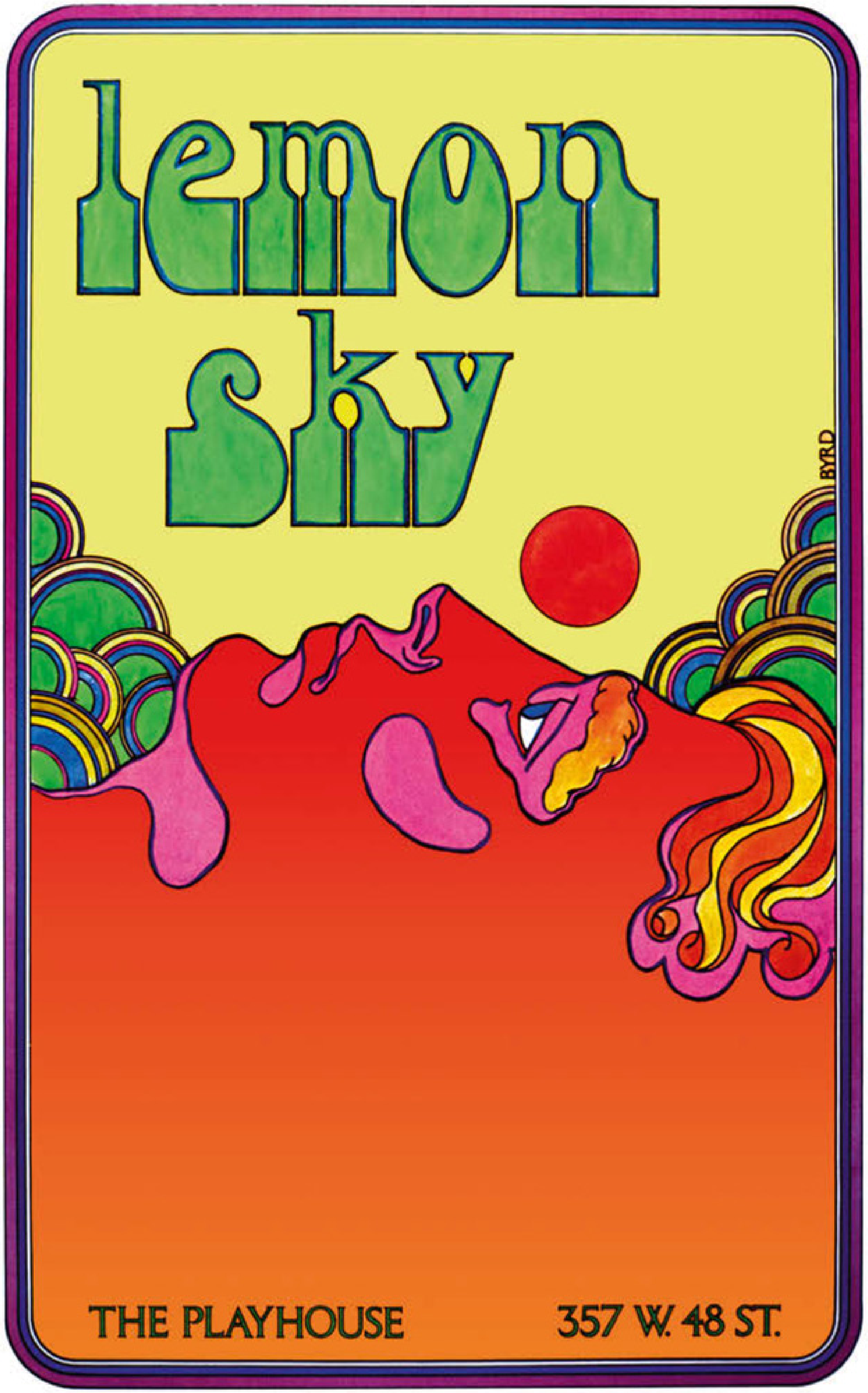
The Lost Colony

1973

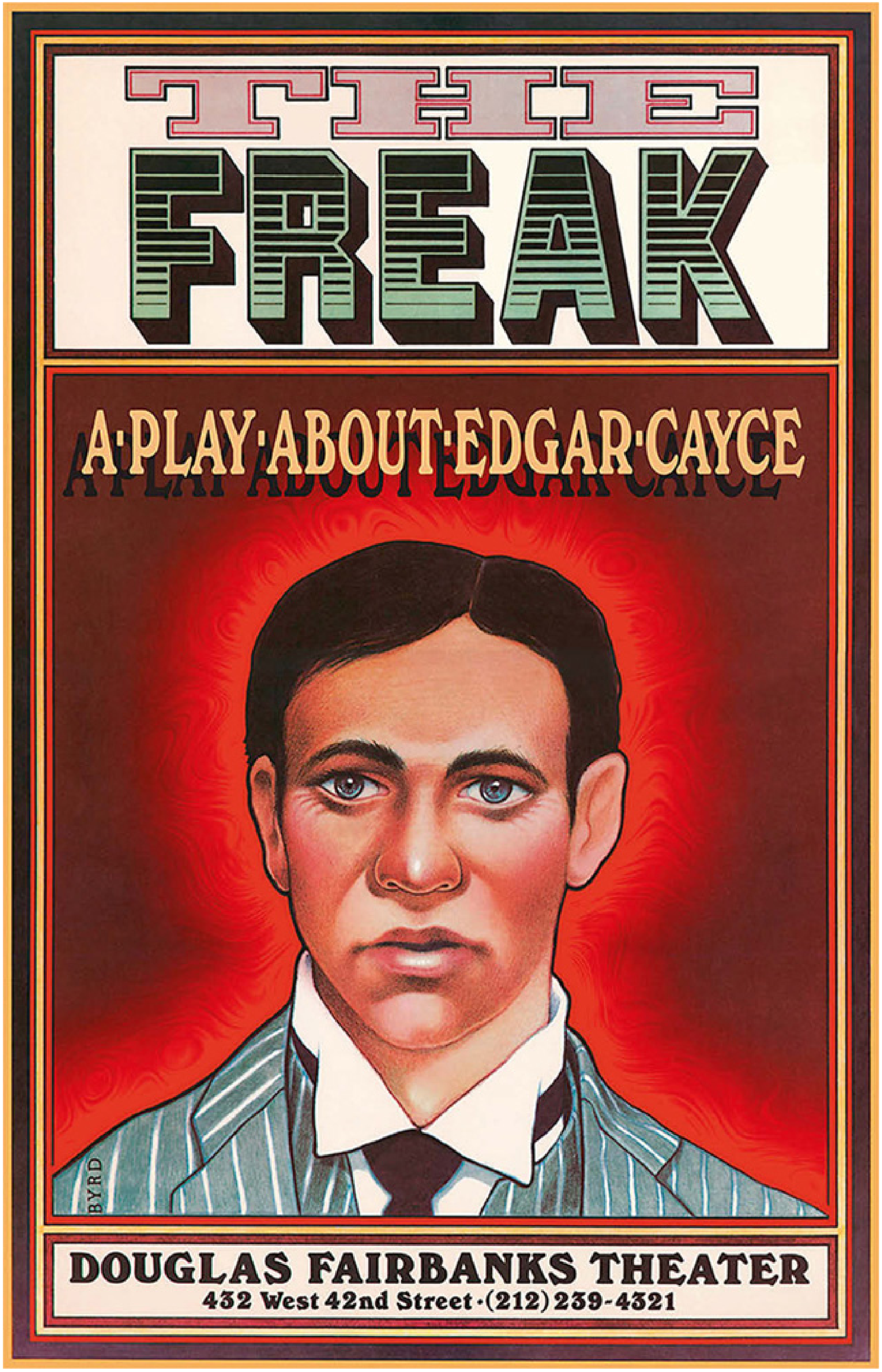
33rd PRODUCTION SEASON

Official Souvenir Program $1.50

Byrd designed this program for the thirty-third annual production of The Lost Colony, *one of the longest-running symphonic outdoor dramas*.


lemon
sky
BYRD
THE PLAYHOUSE
357 W. 48 ST.

This poster was created in 1971 for Lanford Wilson's Lemon Sky, *a coming-of-age play that starred a young Christopher Walken in one of his first off-Broadway performances. His father was played by Charles Durning*.

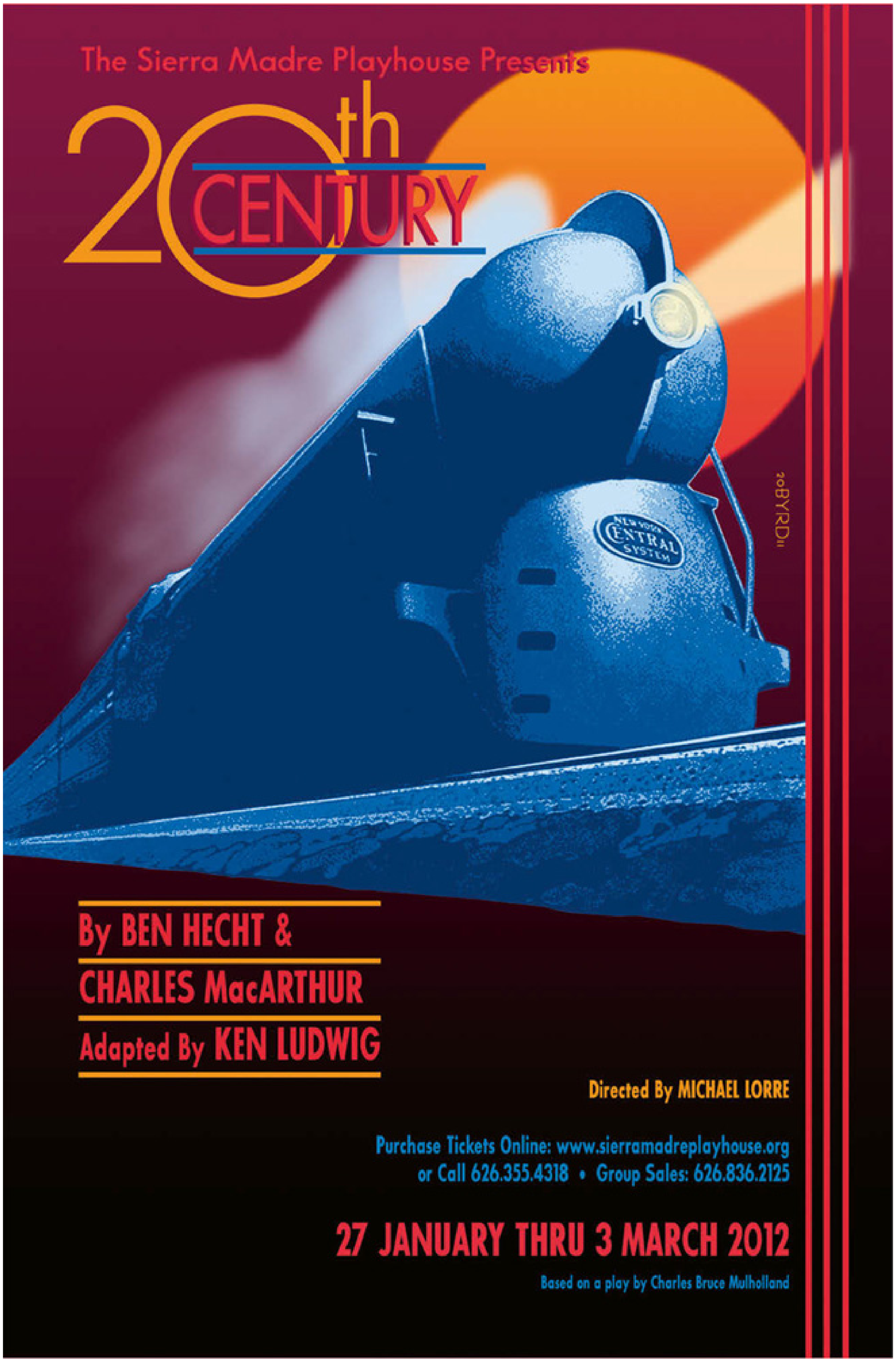


THE
FREAK

A·PLAY·ABOUT·EDGAR·CAYCE

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS THEATER
432 West 42nd Street·(212) 239-4321

Byrd created this poster for the 1982 off-Broadway production of The Freak, *which tells the story of Edgar Cayce, an early twentieth-century mystic, psychic, and faith healer*.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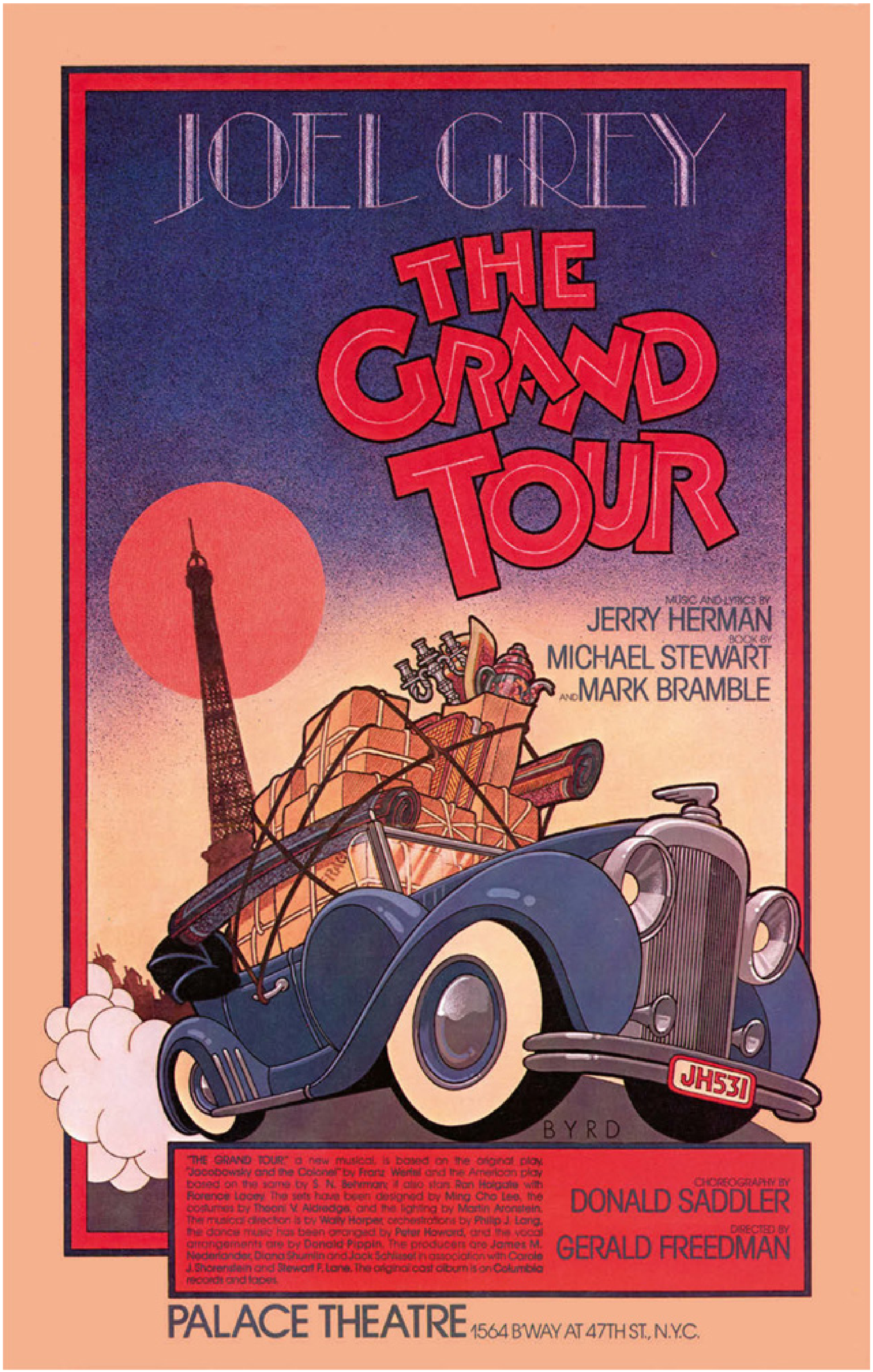
27 JANUARY THRU 3 MARCH 2012

Based on a play by Charles Bruce Mulholland

This poster was designed for the 2013 revival of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's 1932 play 20th Century. *Byrd did many shows for the Sierra Madre Playhouse*.



JOEL GREY

THE GRAND TOUR

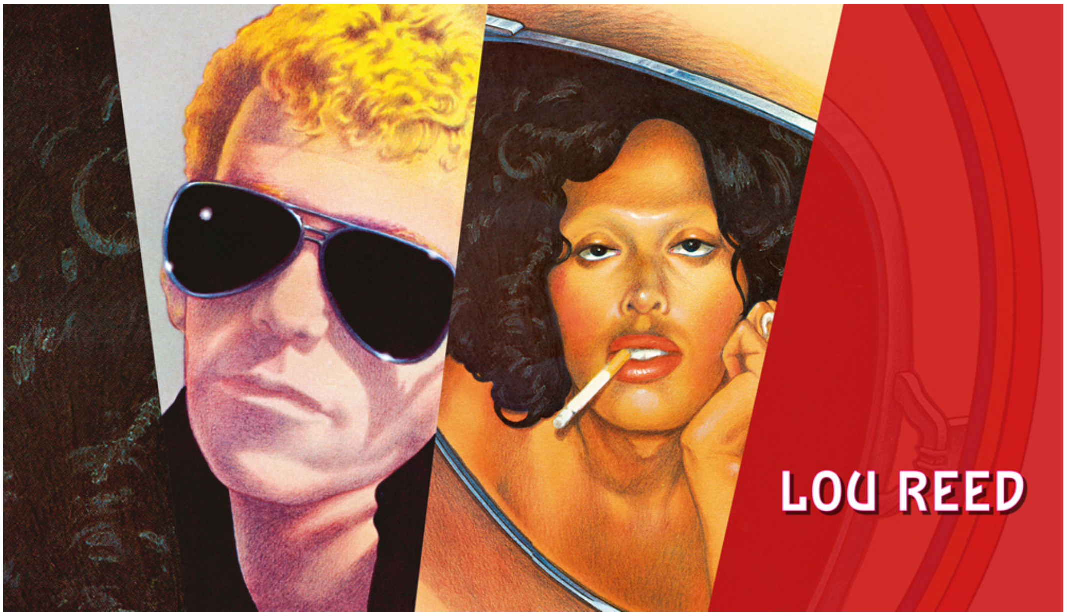
MUSIC AND LYRICS BY
JERRY HERMAN
BOOK BY
MICHAEL STEWART
AND **MARK BRAMBLE**

"THE GRAND TOUR," a new musical, is based on the original play "Jacobowsky and the Colonel" by Franz Werfel and the American play based on the same by S. N. Behrman; it also stars Ron Holgate with Florence Lacey. The sets have been designed by Ming Cho Lee, the costumes by Theoni V. Aldredge, and the lighting by Martin Aronstein. The musical direction is by Wally Harper, orchestrations by Philip J. Lang, the dance music has been arranged by Peter Howard, and the vocal arrangements are by Donald Pippin. The producers are James M. Nederlander, Diana Shumlin and Jack Schlissel in association with Carole J. Shorenstein and Stewart F. Lane. The original cast album is on Columbia records and tapes.

CHOREOGRAPHY BY
DONALD SADDLER
DIRECTED BY
GERALD FREEDMAN

PALACE THEATRE 1564 B'WAY AT 47TH ST., N.Y.C.

Byrd created this theater poster for the 1979 The Grand Tour, *which starred Joel Grey, and for which he was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Leading Actor in a Musical. The car became the centerpiece of his concept, as it was a central character in the play. Byrd remembers, "I think I got this job through Joel Grey, as we often ate at the same health bar on Fifty-Seventh Street."*


LOU REED

1974

Through the late sixties and early seventies, Byrd built a reputation as an innovative and risk-taking designer for rock shows and Broadway productions. But great talent rarely remains a secret, and soon Byrd is commissioned to draw an album cover for Lou Reed. Not only was *Sally Can't Dance* Reed's highest-charting album, it also made for an interesting story.

Robert von Goeben: Let's talk about Lou Reed's *Sally Can't Dance* album cover. This job was for RCA Records, right?

David Edward Byrd: Yes. I got a call from the art director, Acy Lehman. I did a few things for RCA Victor, but it wasn't always the same art director 'cause there were a lot of them at RCA. But I got a call, and he said, "I'd like you to do this album cover for *Sally Can't Dance*," which turned out to be Lou's biggest hit. They called it *Sally Can't Dance*, because that was the song that was on the top ten. Acy Lehman set up a meeting with me and Lou Reed at his favorite bar, the Ninth Circle on Tenth Street in the West Village of New York City. I used to hang out there, but I hung more at this other gay bar, Julius, which was half a block away, and these were both Mafia bars. The Mafia ran the gay bars, and they had connections with the police. Because, as you know, the whole gay thing was illegal. And whenever election time came around, they would do these raids where they would arrest you! There were rules in those days, like you had to be facing the bar, not away from the bar … ever. So you couldn't look at one another. Then Julius put up giant mirrors behind the bar so that you could see each other through the mirror. Isn't that ridiculous? The Ninth Circle was where

Edward Albee, the playwright who wrote *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, would hang out. I used to see him there, and he was funny but in a very snarky way. I told him about how I saw the first production of *Tiny Alice* in Pittsburgh, and we got into a big conversation about it.

RVG: So the place you met Lou Reed was not your regular hangout?

DEB: No. My regular hangout was a half a block away. I liked the Ninth Circle better, but I hooked up more at Julius. Lou loved drag queens! So I go into the Ninth Circle, and there he is at this little table right inside the front door. I sat down, and we did the chitchat and established who we were, and he had brought this box. It was literally a shoebox full of Polaroids of drag queens. Then he gave me this Polaroid of … umm, I used to know her name … which I found out from author Aidan Levy, who wrote a biography of Lou.

RVG: Had you ever met Reed before?

DEB: No. I had his albums, and he was one of my favorites.

RVG: What was his demeanor when you met him?

DEB: We were drinking beers, and he showed me this Polaroid, and he said her name. It was a drag name, like Kitten Caboodle or something like that. [*laughs*] She was obviously very stoned, and he had nudes of her wrapped in plastic wrap, which I thought was kind of cool. He had photos of a lot of these drag queens in crazy situations. So, I decided to put her as a reflection in his sunglasses from the cover. I didn't know if people would get it, but I hoped they would. Lou got it, so it was okay. Oh boy, I wish I could remember her name. Wait … René de la Bush!

RVG: Did you ever meet her?

DEB: Not that I know of. [*laughs*]

RVG: Did he give you any direction on what he wanted for the cover?

DEB: Well, he gave me Polaroids of himself and one of René. He actually gave me several. They were SX-70 Polaroids, and they used to be in my Polaroid collection, but they were lost along the way.

RVG: You don't have them anymore?

DEB: I lost all visual records of myself. I don't have anything. I don't have any records of me or anything in my life. I'm like a nonperson. I never thought to buy a camera or to take a photograph my entire life. I don't know why that is. I kick myself for this—but that's all over now, baby blue. So back to the cover, I just thought, *Well, why don't I do a Norman Rockwell?* This is my Norman Rockwell of Lou Reed. [*laughs*]

RVG: You decided to play it straight on this one?

DEB: Yeah, because he's so cool looking. And I really like this portrait I created of him; it's very subtle.

RVG: The album cover is so graphic and clean. When you handed this in the art to RCA, were they thrilled by it? Do you remember the reaction from the company?

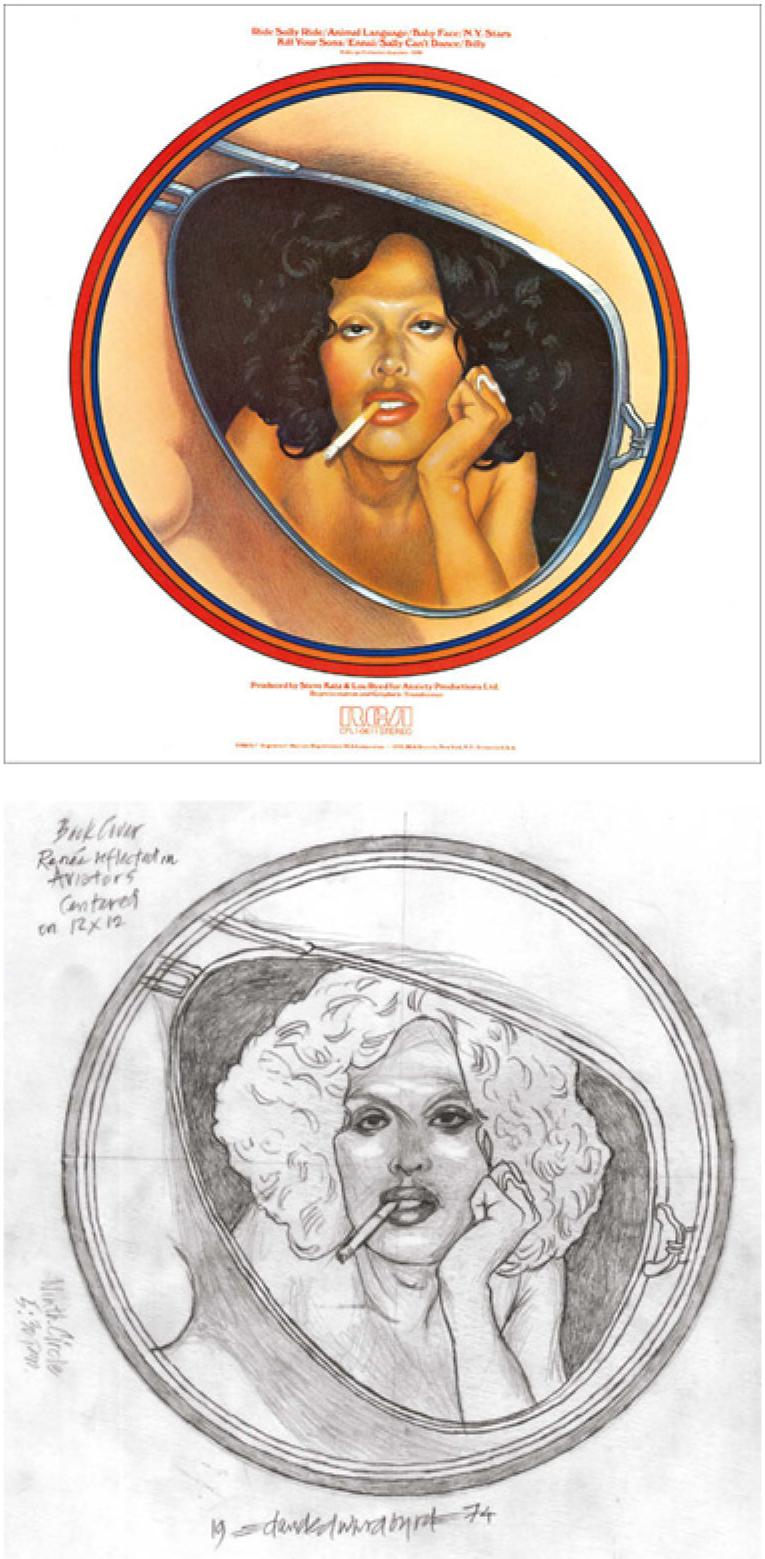
DEB: Oh yeah, they loved it.

RVG: And how did the evening end?

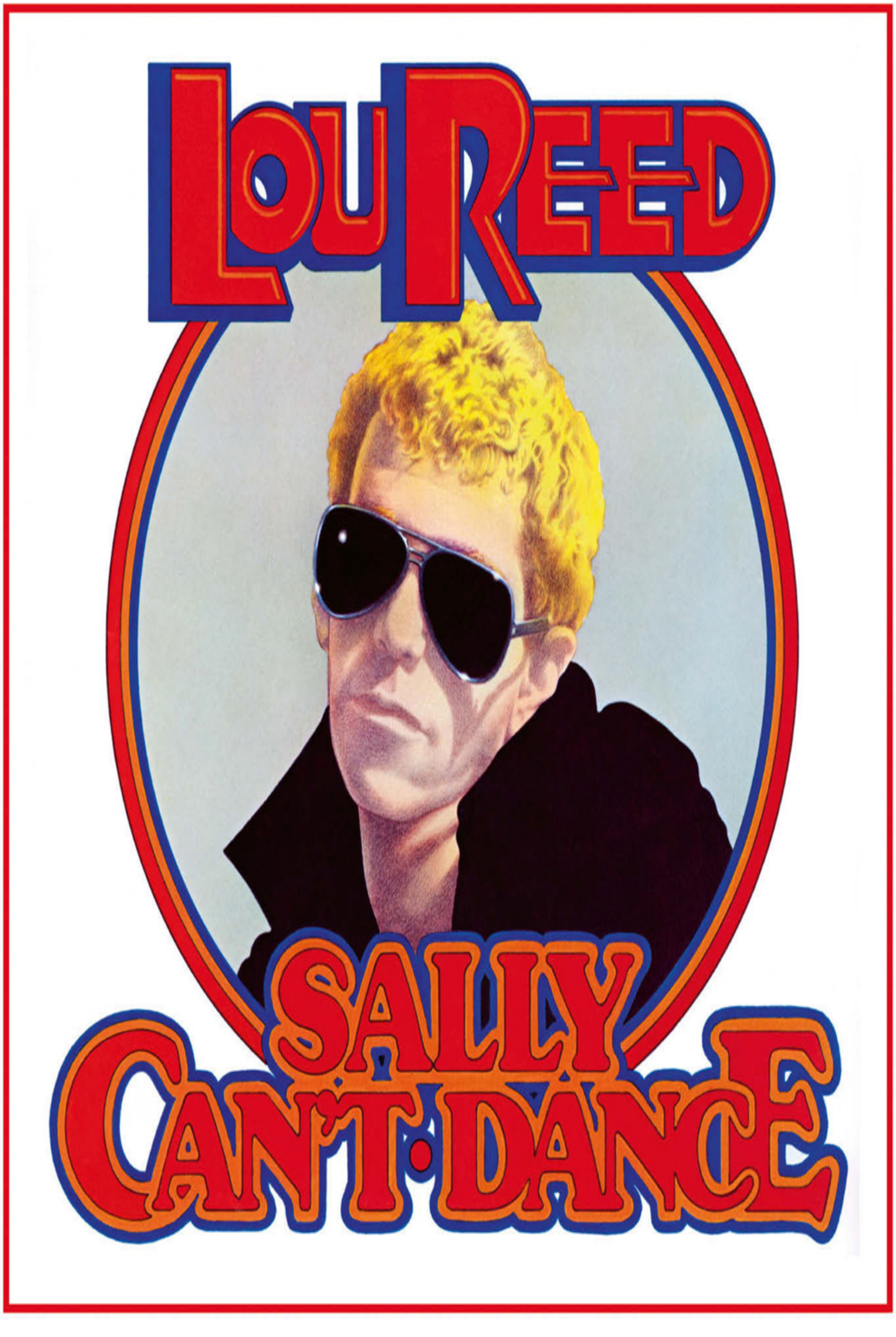
DEB: We talked about some of the drag queens that were there, and a couple of his friends came in near the end of the meeting.

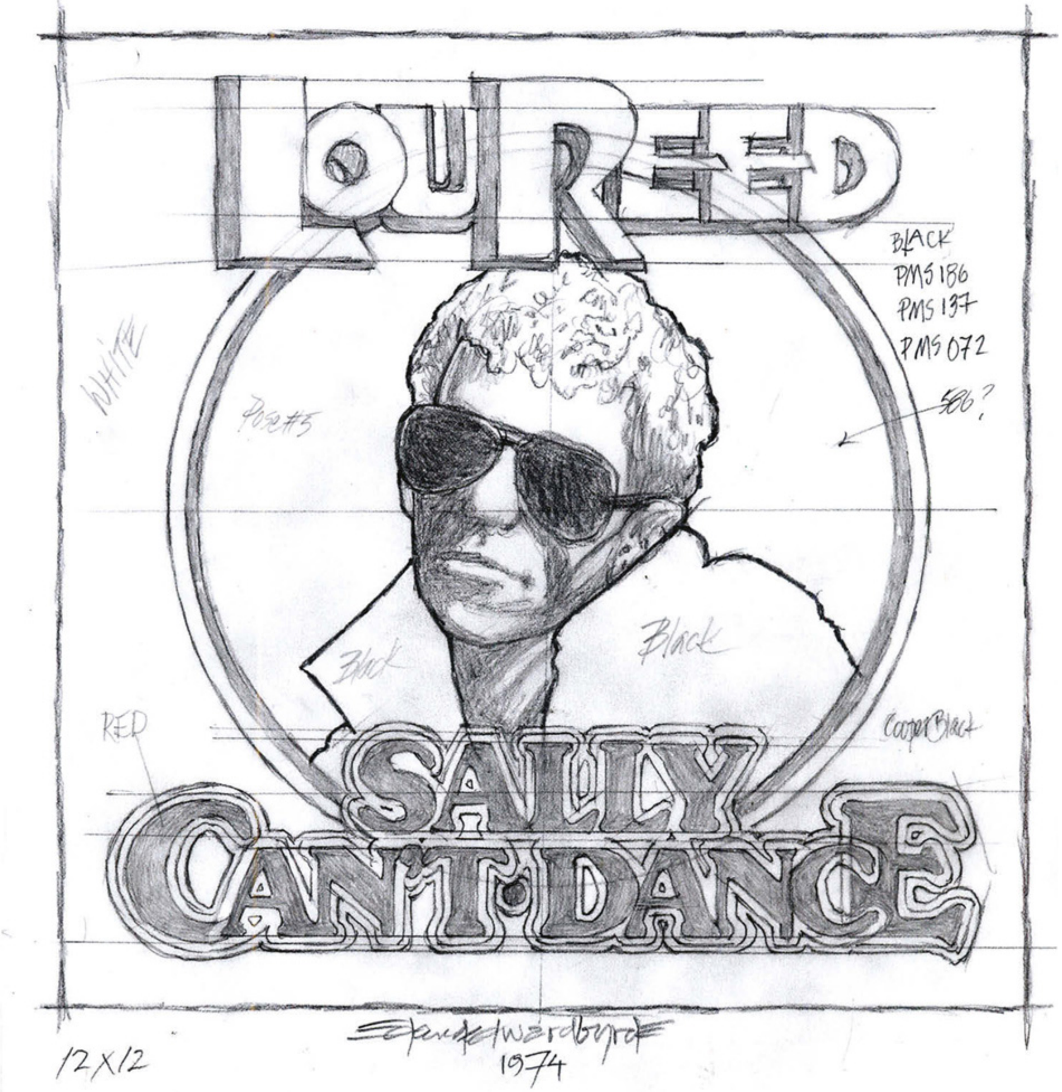
RVG: Last question. Was he as cool as he seems?

DEB: I thought so. When I met with him, he had that beaten-up look, but I liked that. Kind of like Tommy Lee Jones has that kind of beaten-up look. I thought we could move in together. [*laughs*]


Ride Sally Ride/Animal Language/Baby Face/N.Y. Stars
Kill Your Sons/Ennui/Sally Can't Dance/Billy
Produced by Steve Katz & Lou Reed for Anxiety Productions Ltd.
RCA
Back Cover
René reflected in
Aviators
Centered
on 12X12
19 davidedwardbyrd 74

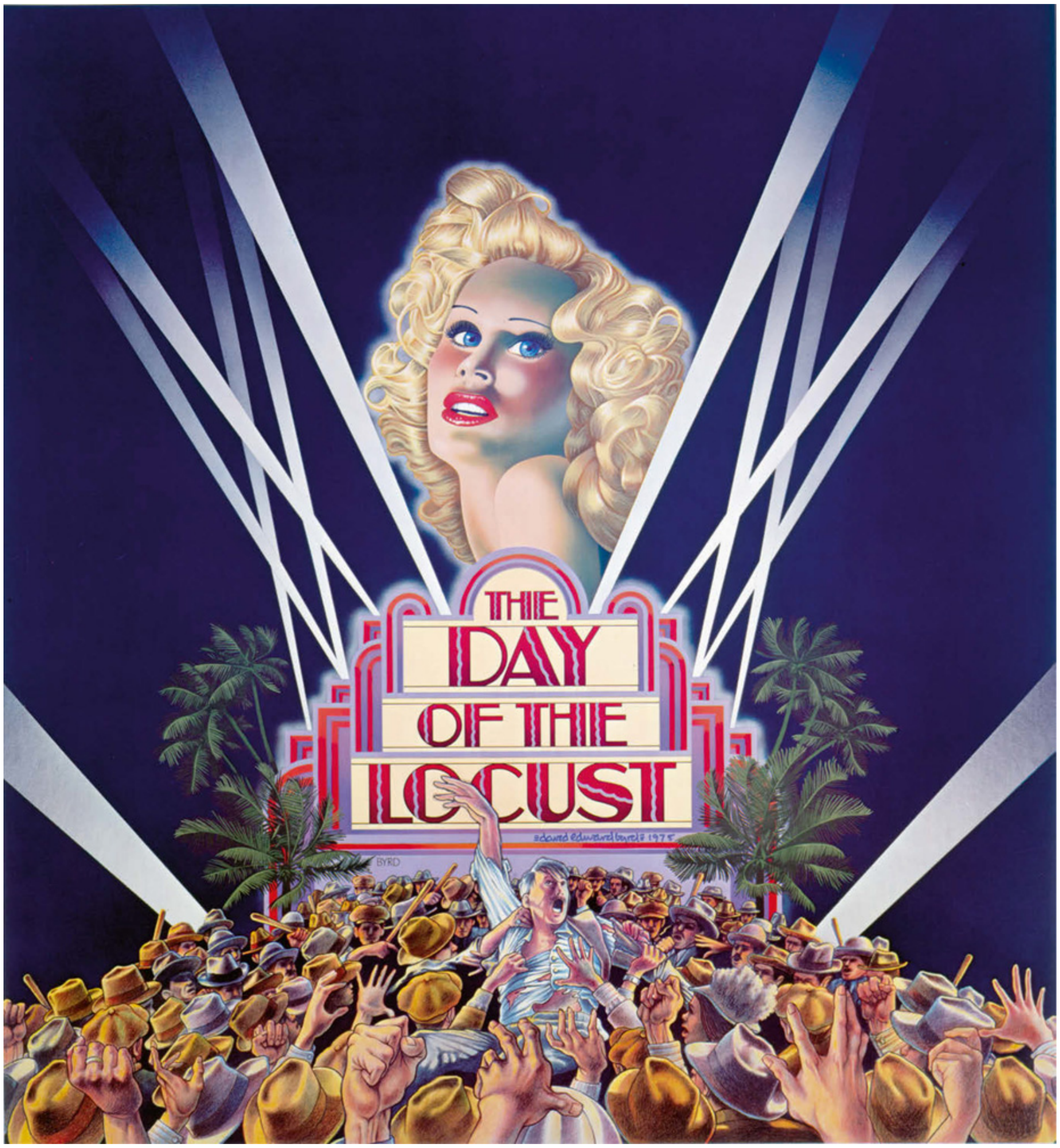
Byrd's final illustration (top) and concept sketch (bottom) of René de la Bush for the back cover of the 1974 Lou Reed album Sally Can't Dance *were drawn from a Polaroid taken by Reed. The* *pencil sketch includes a note of when ("5:30 pm") and where ("Ninth Circle" bar in New York City) he met Reed to discuss the cover.*


LOU REED
SALLY
CAN'T·DANCE


LOU REED
BLACK
PMS 186
PMS 137
PMS 072
586?
WHITE
Pose #5
Black
Black
RED
Cooper Black
SALLY
CAN'T DANCE
12 X 12
edwardbyrd
1974

Byrd created the front cover illustration (left) and pencil concept sketch (right) for Sally Can’t Dance, *which was Reed’s highest-charting album in the United States*.

THE DAY OF
THE LOCUST


THE
DAY
OF THE
LOCUST
edward edward byrd 1975
BYRD

Byrd created this poster for the 1975 film The Day of the Locust.

1975

It's 1975, and Byrd's New York City dance card is filled with rock and theater jobs. Then he gets a phone call that he thinks is a hoax but turns out to be a coveted assignment for a major motion picture. Just like *Follies*, this isn't a party Byrd is formally invited to, but his creativity (and a well-placed champion) rules the day, and he gets the gig.

Robert von Goeben: Let's talk about the movie poster for *The Day of the Locust*.

David Edward Byrd: Oh yeah, director John Schlesinger. I was in my studio and the phone rang, and the voice at the other end said, "Is David Byrd there?" And I said, "Oh Rocco, stop trying to confuse me." I thought it was my friend calling me and pretending to be British. So I said, "If you keep doing it, I'm gonna hang up." And he said, "Oh no, this is John Schlesinger, and I wanted to talk to you about a film." And I said, "Oh my god, I'm so sorry. I'm really sorry about that, I thought you were my friend; he would do stuff like that." And he said, "Oh no, this is serious. Can you come to my suite at the Carlyle hotel tomorrow at 2:30?" I went to meet him at the Carlyle, and he said, "I'm doing a film, which is a project I've wanted to do my whole life. It's *The Day of the Locust*, which is a book by Nathanael West." And I said, "Oh yeah, I've read that twice." I also read *Miss Lonelyhearts* by him, which also was made into a film. Nathanael West was driving with his wife to Mexico for a vacation, and they were both killed in a head-on. He had a pretty dramatic life. But he was a great writer, and I knew the film would be very complex. He said, "I'm testing

Goldie Hawn for the title role of Faye Greener." The character was a kind of a starlet-tart, of sorts.

RVG: And what was your impression of John Schlesinger when you met him?

DEB: Oh, what a sweet, cheery British man, with a wonderful sense of humor. I knew his lover, Michael Childers, as well, who was a budding photographer. And he provided me with the black-and-white photographs of Karen Black, which I used for the center of the poster. They also provided a lot of other footage, like some of Donald Sutherland. He was one of the major male leads, and his character name, Homer Simpson, was where artist Matt Groening got the name for the main character in *The Simpsons*.

RVG: What did Schlesinger tell you about the film?

DEB: He had done so well for Paramount financially with *Midnight Cowboy* that they let him make *The Day of the Locust*, which was the love of his life. But they hated the idea. He said, "They're gonna hate me when they see this, because it's really a dark critique of Hollywood." Which, of course, it was, and it couldn't be darker. He had a fabulous cast: Karen Black, Donald Sutherland, Burgess Meredith, Geraldine Page, and Bill Atherton, who was the main protagonist, and with whom I attended Carnegie Tech back in the day.

RVG: Did you see William Atherton in the process of working on this movie at all?

DEB: No, but I saw him when we both appeared at the Grauman's Chinese Theatre for a screening of *The Day of the Locust*. He's a working actor, and he's done a lot of films and TV. I think he's been a pretty successful actor.

RVG: When you were talking to Schlesinger, did he tell you what he wanted for the poster?

DEB: Not really. I think he gave me the gestalt, and I took it from there.

RVG: The art is fabulously Hollywood, very Marilyn Monroe.

DEB: Yeah. Faye Greener was a cheesy gal, and she took financial advantage of Homer Simpson. Homer was a lost guy from the Midwest who retired to California. I know Schlesinger had this one shot of him sitting outside of his little Los Angeles bungalow while overripe oranges dropped from the trees, going "squish." I mean, it was just a brilliant scene. It really tells you who Homer is. He's kind of a lost soul who dies in the end. He's literally torn to pieces by the premiere crowd and stomped to death. If you haven't seen the film, it's an amazing experience.

RVG: Did you go through proof after proof on this, or did it come together pretty quickly?

DEB: I did one sketch, but it was wrong, and Schlesinger said, "Oh no, the star has to be in the center of the piece." What I did was really wrong, and it was kind of embarrassing. I always called this failed concept the "Bug Poster." [*laughs*] But I quickly revised the sketch once I received Michael Childers's gorgeous photographs of Karen Black. I also received some outtakes of Homer being torn apart by the crowd, so I was able to create that vivid scene below Karen and the marquee. I drew so many hats and hands that I felt like a drunken haberdasher. I did the first sketch, which is right here in my studio. I drew a pencil sketch of Karen and the marquee, then they just wanted me to add this dramatic death-of-Homer scene. I painted this by hand, but I would have done it differently if I knew what I was doing at the time. But I wanted to learn how to paint with acrylic. I don't think I did the best job in the world, but everyone in the Schlesinger camp seemed to like it a great deal.

RVG: Well, the technique is fantastic.

DEB: The only change they asked for in the whole thing was about her eyes. I had her eyes lidded—you know, with sexy lids—and they said they wanted her eyes to evoke "sexual terror." So I thought, *What?* I went home and said, "Well the only thing I can do is open them up wide." What else could you do to evoke "sexual terror"?

RVG: On this poster, you put your name in the art. That’s unusual for a movie poster, isn’t it?

DEB: Yeah. You’re not allowed to do that. Nobody said anything, and I didn’t take it off.

RVG: No one commented?

DEB: No one commented. Let me tell you the story about the presentation to Paramount. It was pretty weird, since Schlesinger already told me I had the job. Mine was an “alternative” poster because no one told the producer, Jerome Hellman, about this poster. Nobody knew, and then Schlesinger said to me, “We’re going over to Paramount to present your art.” And I thought we would just go in, a few people would see it, and then we’d go home. But that was definitely not the case. We went in and met with Frank Yablans, the president of Paramount Pictures. We went into the room and every wall was covered with presentations, huge ad agency presentations of *The Day of the Locust* poster concepts. And then we come in with my little painting, and I thought, *Oh shit, they’ve hired, like, five agencies*. But mine is what Schlessinger wanted, and he convinced them. They accepted it, but they wanted to see the same design all in silver and blue. So I would have to do the whole thing over in silver and blue, just for them to see if they liked that treatment. I told Schlessinger, “God, it took me so long to do this, and they want me to do another one in silver and blue?” And he said, “Well, let me get you to an art director.” I got to an art director and said, “I can’t do this in a week, a silver-and-blue version.” So, what we ended up doing was a black and white of the poster, which I then silvered and blued as best I could. After that, no one ever said anything about that silver-and-blue effort. The studio went with my first drawing. Producers often want to have a part in the creation of the art. People want to say, “You see that? It used to be *this*, and I made him put *that* in.”

RVG: Just because they wanted to have input?

DEB: Yes, it was like, “My secretary asked me if you can do it in orange and purple.” It was hysterical and maddening at the same time.

RVG: So John Schlesinger was the one who championed your design.

DEB: Yes.

RVG: Does this poster get much attention?

DEB: Well, yeah! I mean, a lot of people tell me how much they love it. There are also all these Karen Black fans, mostly gay men, it seems.

RVG: You had mentioned when you did the Broadway poster for *Follies*, one of your original designs was the Roxy Theatre crumbling in the background.

DEB: Yeah.

RVG: And now you've got this one with the klieg lights and the blonde starlet and sexual terror. I sense a theme of fading Hollywood glamour in your work, like *Sunset Boulevard*. Was that something that fascinated you?

DEB: Oh yes, oh yes. I worshipped *Sunset Boulevard*, as well as its director Billy Wilder. It's one of the greatest films ever made.

RVG: What is it about the stardom going downhill that was artistically appealing to you?

DEB: Well, I'm also a rabid fan of film noir, and I just like dark stories. I don't like stories where lovers drive off in the sunset; you know that old cliché. I like stories that end bleakly. I figured, this wouldn't be a candy-colored treatment of *The Day of the Locust*, because I had seen Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* twice. So I knew the kind of film he made when he wanted to. That said, it was beautiful period stuff. Great, great, great acting. They used six sound stages to do the final Hollywood Boulevard scene. This whole tearing Homer apart scene—it was mammoth. I'm so glad he made that scene.

RVG: Burgess Meredith got nominated for an Academy Award for this film.

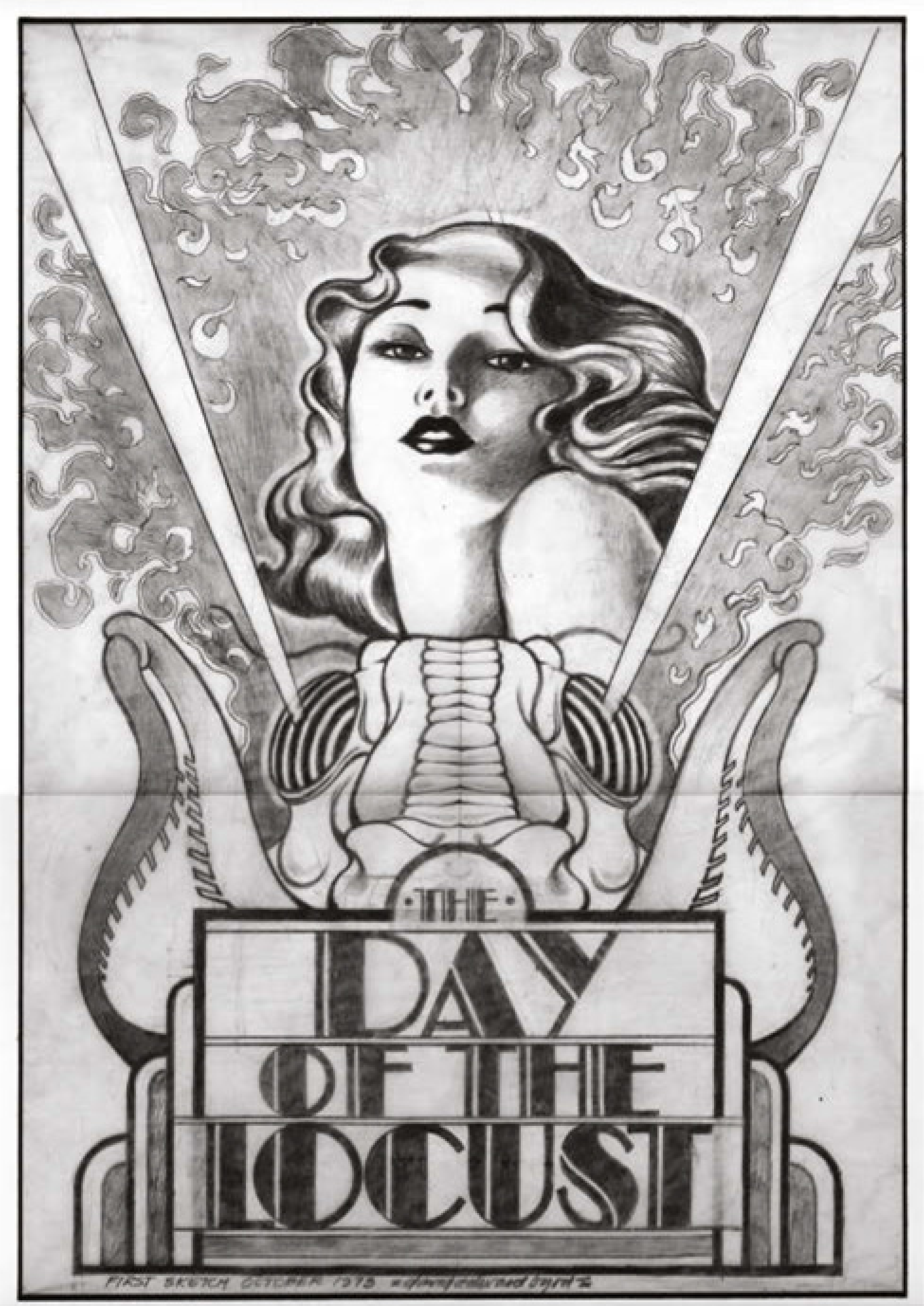
DEB: He is extraordinary. I mean, extraordinary! He's so special in this film. But in the end, Paramount hated the movie, and they were mad at Schlesinger for making a film so critical of Hollywood—they do *not* like that! So in order to appease the powerful, he had to make his next film, *Marathon Man*, with the dentist drilling Dustin Hoffman's tooth to great effect. It was a huge hit, and seemed to make up for the *The Day of the Locust*. Hollywood does not like films that are critical of itself.

RVG: Did you speak to Schlesinger afterward? Did you ever work with him again?

DEB: No, I didn't work with him again, but he thanked me for the poster, and has since passed. I'm still in touch with his partner, Michael Childers, for whom I have done theater work on several occasions.

RVG: I forgot to ask you; how did he get your name to do the job?

DEB: I put it up to gaydar, because I had done *Follies*. Also, Michael Childers was a young, gay photographer at the time and was hip to my work. Queers often help queers, as it were, for which I am eternally grateful!


THE
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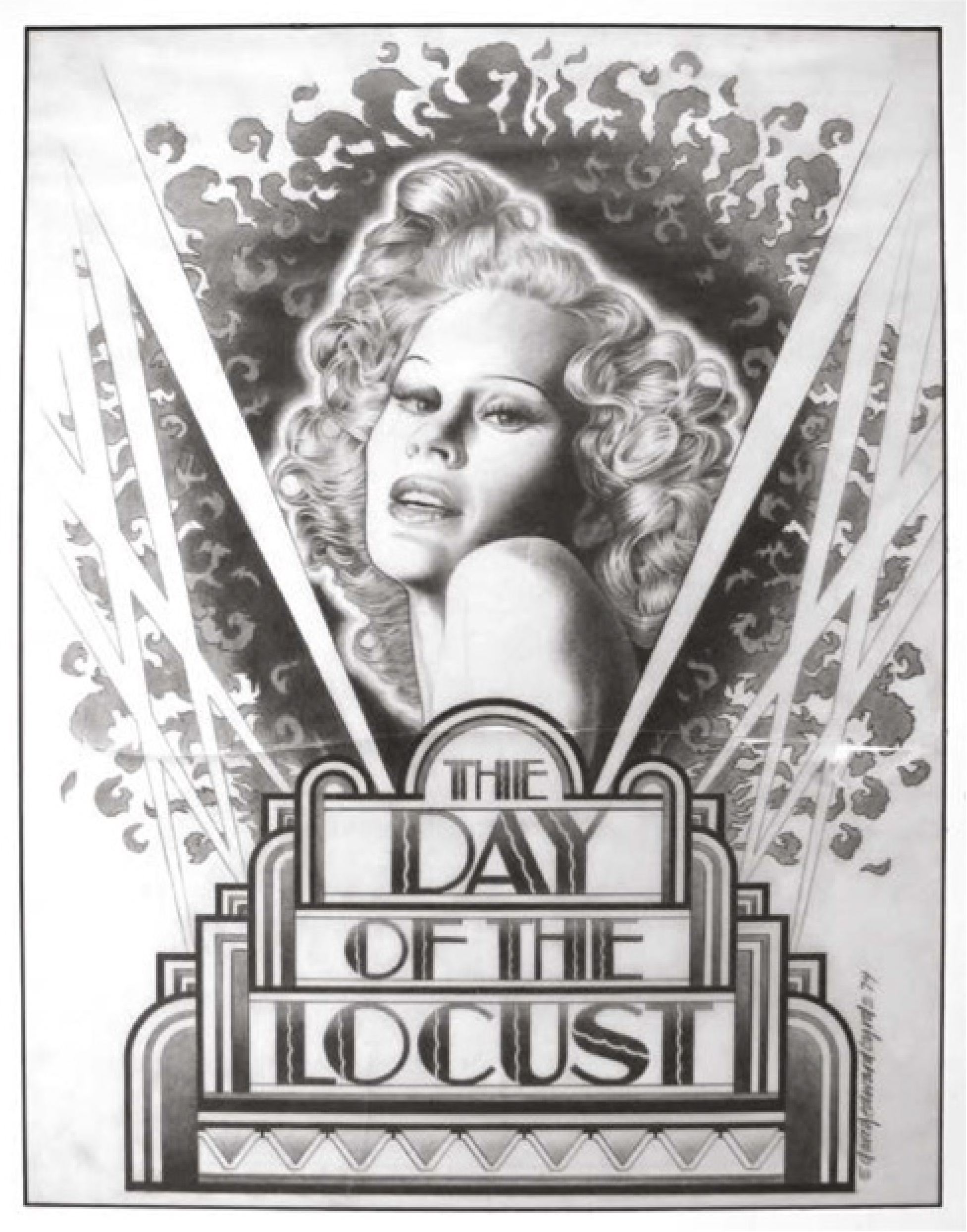
FIRST SKETCH OCTOBER 1973

The first concept sketch for the poster, which Byrd calls his "bug poster," was immediately rejected by the producers. They didn't want any insects in the poster, commenting that it was too literal and not the point of the film.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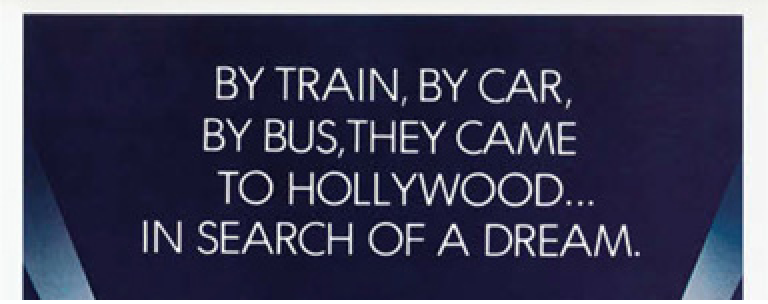
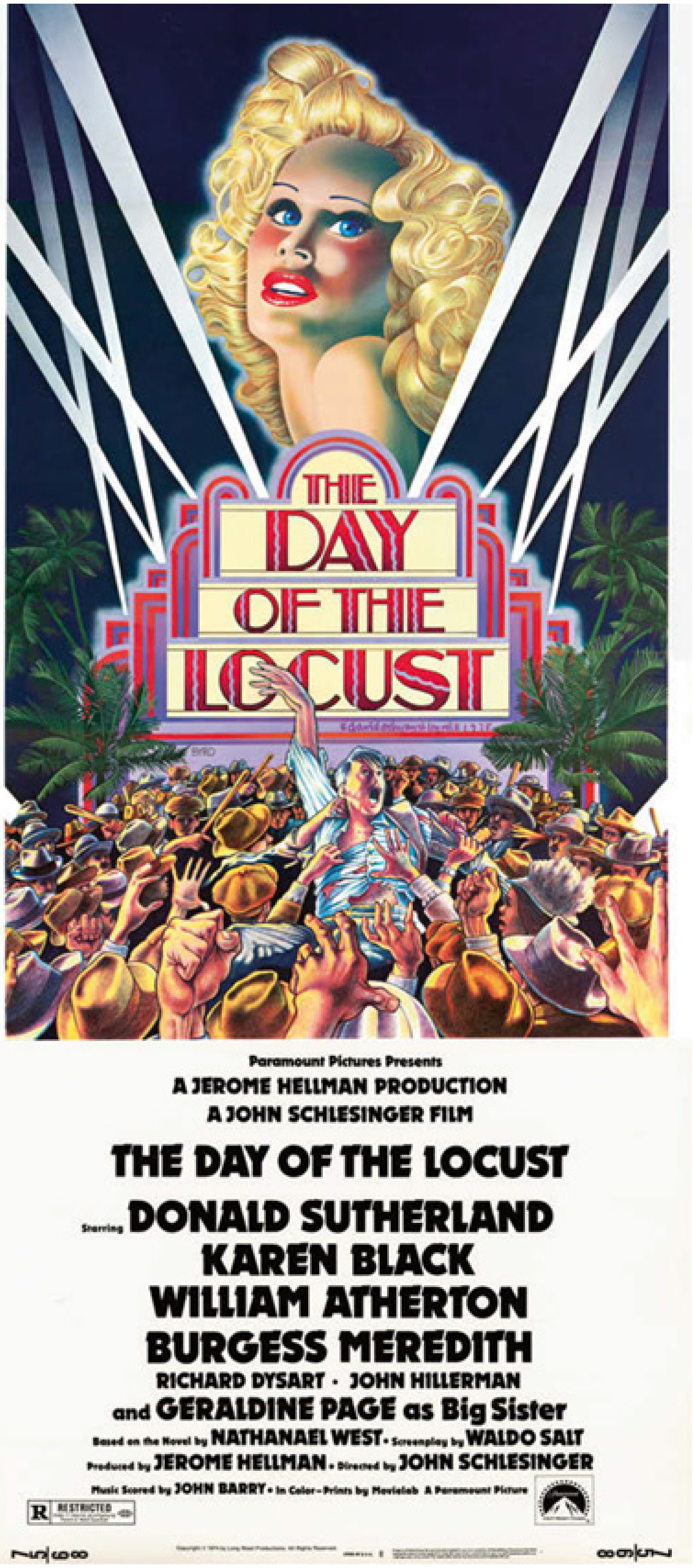
Byrd's second concept drawing was approved. Byrd says the director John Schlesinger was thrilled but asked for the addition of the crowd tearing apart the character Homer Simpson.


BY TRAIN, BY CAR,
BY BUS, THEY CAME
TO HOLLYWOOD...
IN SEARCH OF A DREAM.



Paramount Pictures Presents
A JEROME HELLMAN PRODUCTION
A JOHN SCHLESINGER FILM

THE DAY OF THE LOCUST

Starring **DONALD SUTHERLAND**
KAREN BLACK
WILLIAM ATHERTON
BURGESS MEREDITH
RICHARD DYSART · **JOHN HILLERMAN**
and **GERALDINE PAGE** as Big Sister

Based on the Novel by **NATHANAEL WEST** · Screenplay by **WALDO SALT**
Produced by **JEROME HELLMAN** · Directed by **JOHN SCHLESINGER**
Music Scored by **JOHN BARRY** · In Color – Prints by Movielab A Paramount Picture

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Final long version of the movie poster

KISS

1978

The '70s bring a lot of changes to rock and roll, and as the music industry matures, so does its marketing. There's a new player in town by the name of Casablanca Records, and they soon pull David into the orbit of their brightest star—the band Kiss. In a sign of things to come, the work gets crazier, deadlines get shorter, and while Byrd struggles to hold on, the work is delivered on time.

Robert von Goeben: Let's talk about Casablanca Records and Kiss. How did that work come about?

David Edward Byrd: I got a call from Neil Bogart and went to his office in the famous Brill Building, which is renowned for housing music industry offices where some of the most popular American songs were written—think "Tin Pan Alley". Bogart, previously the "bubble gum king" of Buddha Records, told me he was starting a new label called Casablanca Records. The first thing I noticed on entering his office was that it was painted bright yellow. I immediately told him that my studio was named "The Yellow Studio," an interesting coincidence. He told me he wanted a logo with a portrait of him looking like Rick in the film *Casablanca*. Neil wanted the title "Casablanca" to be a neon type evoking Rick's Cafe from the film. I created the logo as a pencil comp and next showed him a color comp. He approved it, but as I recall, it had to be finished by another artist due to my sudden Broadway commitments.

RVG: You've had experiences with executives. What was different about Neil Bogart?

DEB: As far as art knowledge and appreciation, most executives never got any higher than Havana cigars. Neil really impressed me; he was amazingly creative. I mean, he basically created disco. It turned out Neil Bogart was a collector of rare, illustrated books, and he started me collecting them. Later on, he gave me an antique bound copy of the story of Wagner's opera *Lohengrin* that was illustrated by the great artist Willy Pogany. At one point, Bogart had lent the book to Jimi Hendrix, who tore out a page with a wedding illustration because Jimi was thinking of getting married—of course, he never did. But Neil said he could no longer keep the book because it was "tainted" goods. He could never trade or sell it due to the damage, so he gave it to me. Jimi had cut the page cleanly with a razor blade, but a rare book expert could definitely tell. I still have the book with the page missing. He collected books by artists such as Pogany, Edmund DuLac, and Maxfield Parrish. One thing I vividly remember about Neil Bogart is him riding about Manhattan's Theater District in his black Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud, looking for whatever to happen, whenever.

RVG: Then he got you involved with the band Kiss, right?

DEB: Yeah. My first exposure to the band was very early in their career. I went to photographer Joel Brodsky's studio for a photo shoot for their first album cover. They had cases of champagne, and there were these tables full of gourmet delicacies and turkeys and blah, blah. You know, everybody was smoking dope and drinking champagne like crazy, and I proceeded to get very stoned. I had a terrible hangover, so I started drinking right away, which immediately cured it. But they wanted me to help Peter Criss, he was having [air quotes] "cat makeup problems." But I was not prepared for any of this shit. I wanted to be helpful, but then Peter was not happy with me. So they got this professional makeup lady in, and she worked with him, and I guess it came out all right. But their look was insane! Do you remember, their first cover was a takeoff of *Meet the Beatles*!

RVG: The heads on a black background thing?

DEB: Yes, like the Beatles album, but they looked insane! Neil Bogart thought this makeup was the best thing since sliced bread. But Warner Bros., Casablanca's original distributor, hated it. Hated, hated it! They hated Kiss! But Bill Aucoin, who managed the band, really believed in them and never lost his faith that they would be "the next big thing." And, of course, they were.

RVG: So, fast-forward a few years, and they had this idea for all four of the members to do solo albums and release them at the same time.

DEB: Well, they had decided they wanted me to do this mural, and in each of the four solo Kiss albums would be one-quarter of the mural. It was horizontally conceived, and in your teen-thrill moment, you would tape them to the wall, and then you would have an entire mural of the group hanging in your room—that is, if you had bought all four albums. That was one of Aucoin's genius marketing concepts.

RVG: How much time did they give you to do these?

DEB: They called me Friday, and they wanted it Monday. [*laughs*]

RVG: So how many people worked with you on this?

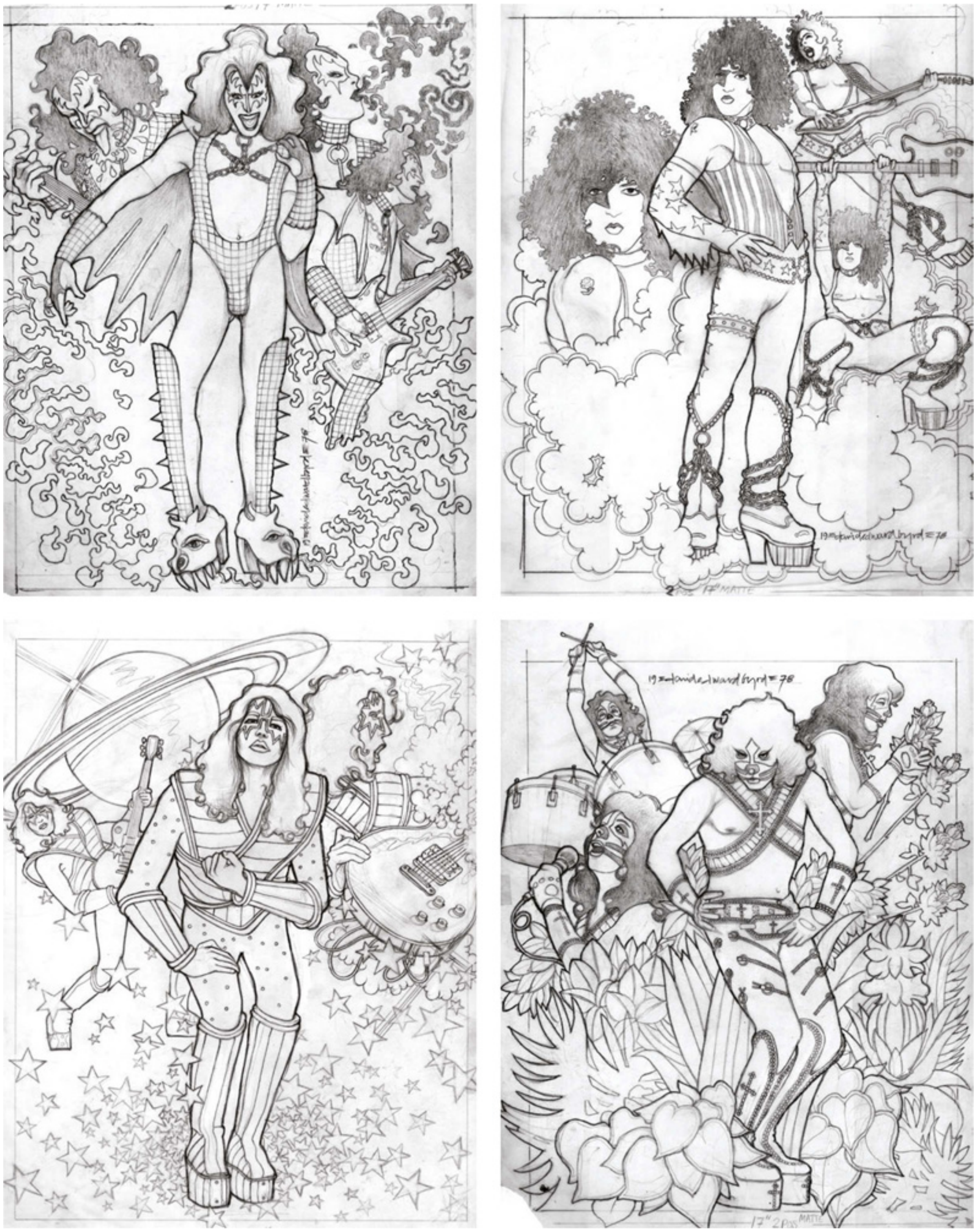
DEB: Just me and my favorite assistant Arthur K. Miller, who's now a very successful artist in his own right. We stayed up day and night pasting all these damn things down. We had to draw all these stars, and then cut them out and paste them down; it was nuts!

RVG: I spoke to Arthur about this, and he said it was unusual for you to complain about a job. You always loved doing art, so what was that about?

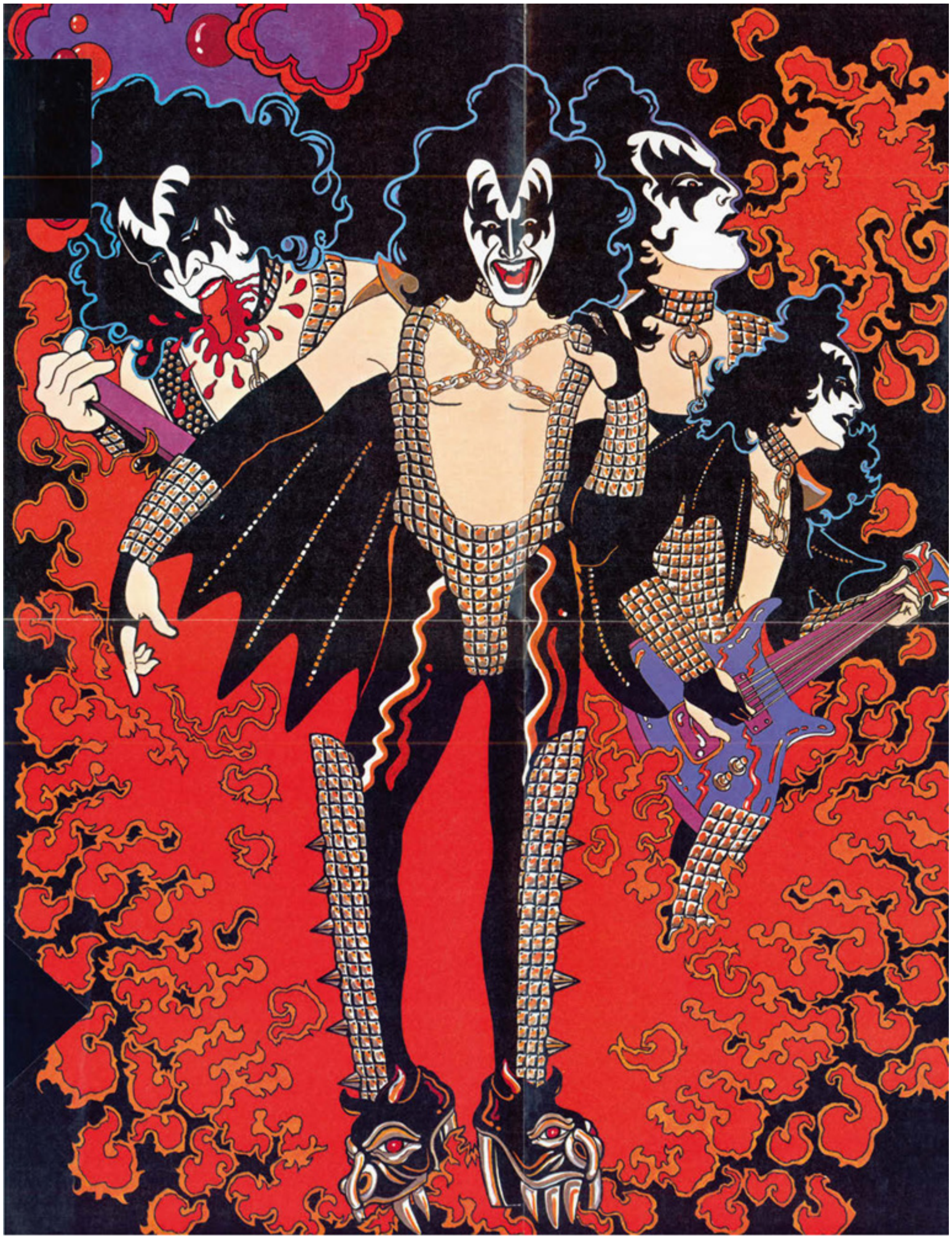
DEB: But by this time, I started being bothered by the ridiculous deadlines. There never was enough time for thoughtful design. But I badly needed money …

RVG: But you'd been under deadline before, what made this so different?

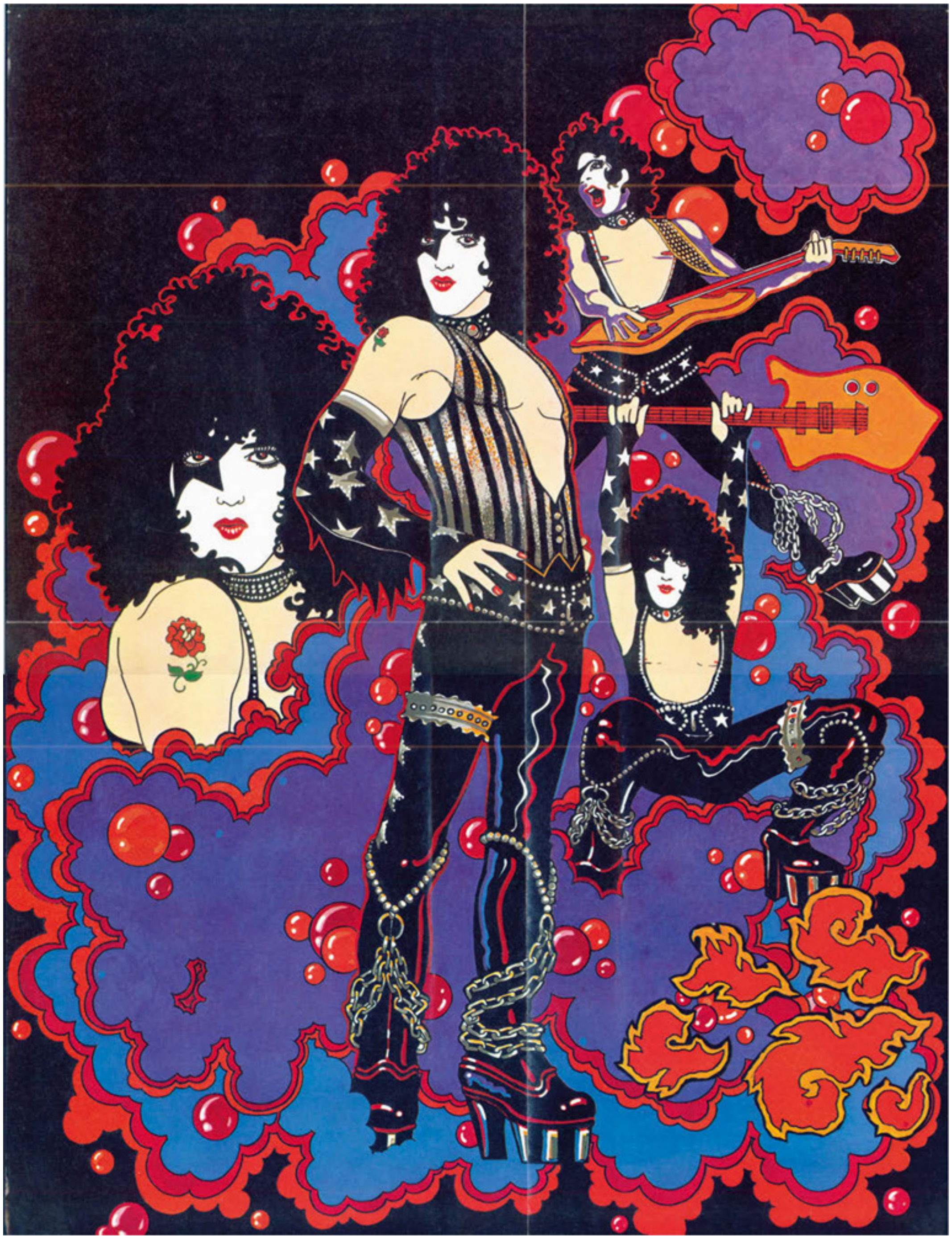
DEB: You're right, it was something more. Kiss was the "new showbiz," big and glitzy, in a way that was not my thing. It made me feel so out of sync. I got through the job, but I think of it as the last days of my personal Pompeii. I was starting to deflate and spiral down; things in my life were disintegrating quickly. The only thing that could have made it better were psychoactive drugs, which had not been invented yet. This was just my lowest point, my nadir.



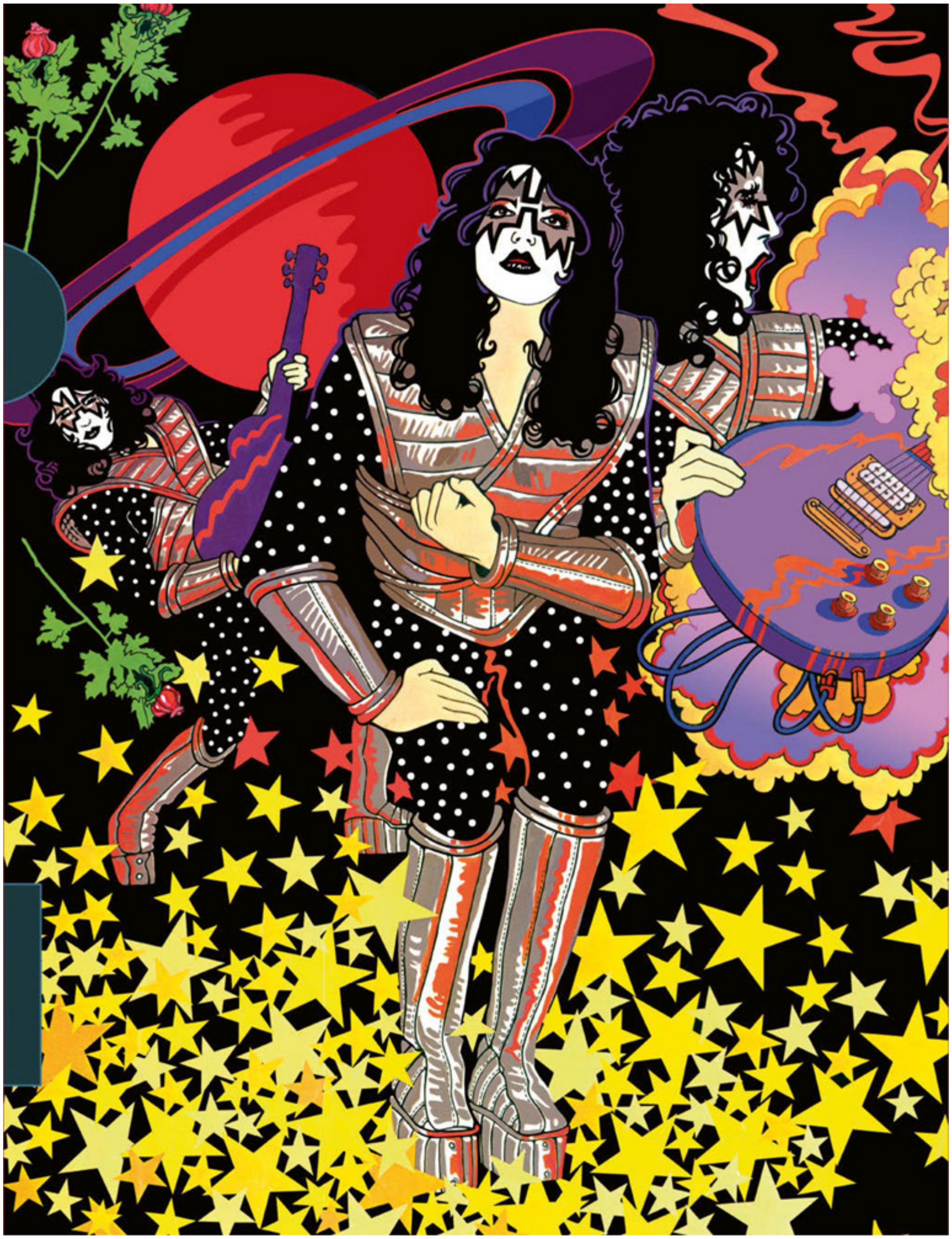
Pencil sketches for the posters were included in the 1978 solo albums by the four members of Kiss. Byrd was well known for his intricate concept sketches, which often went unchanged in his final color designs.



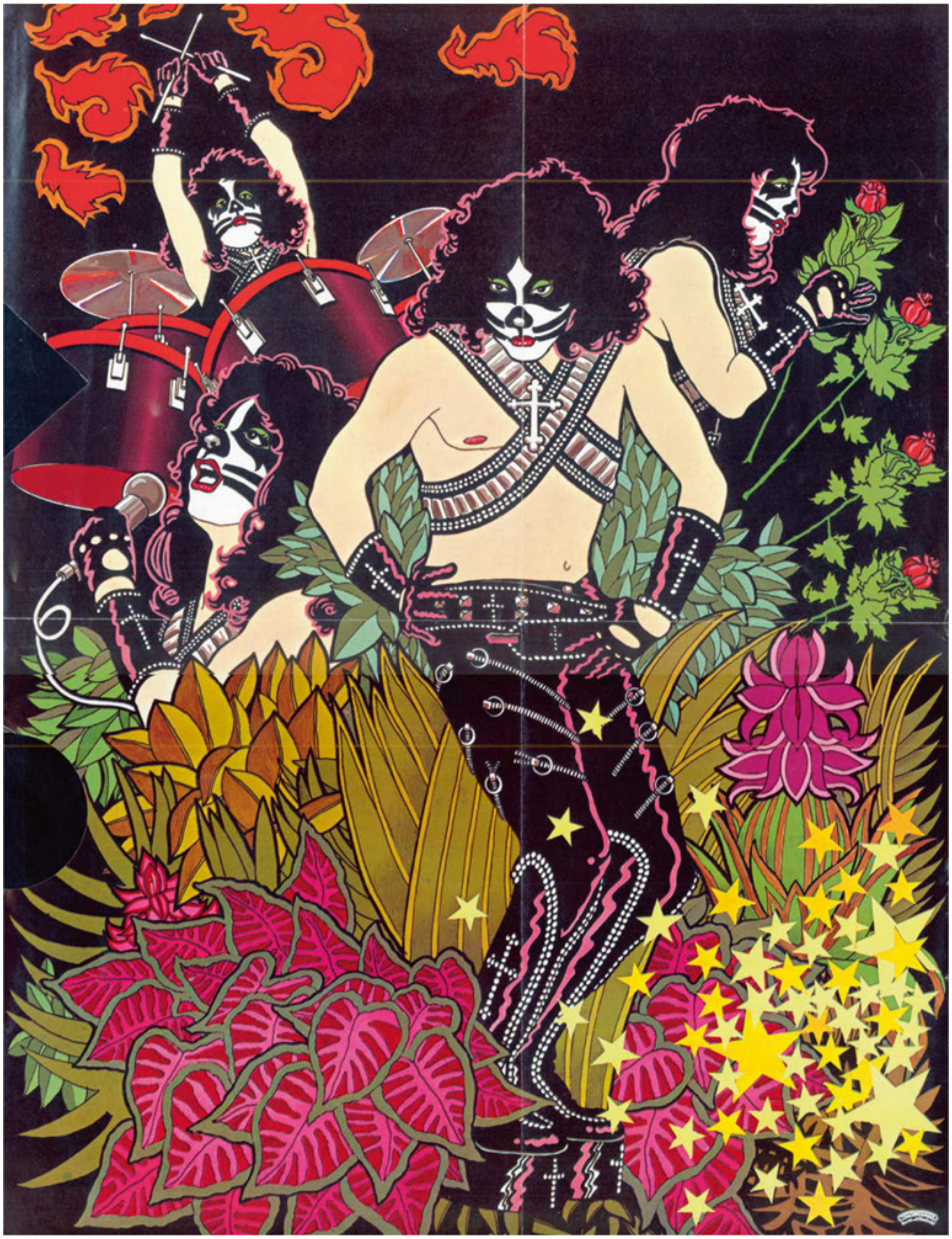
The final printed poster was included in the 1978 solo album for Gene Simmons.



The final printed poster was included in the 1978 solo album for Paul Stanley.

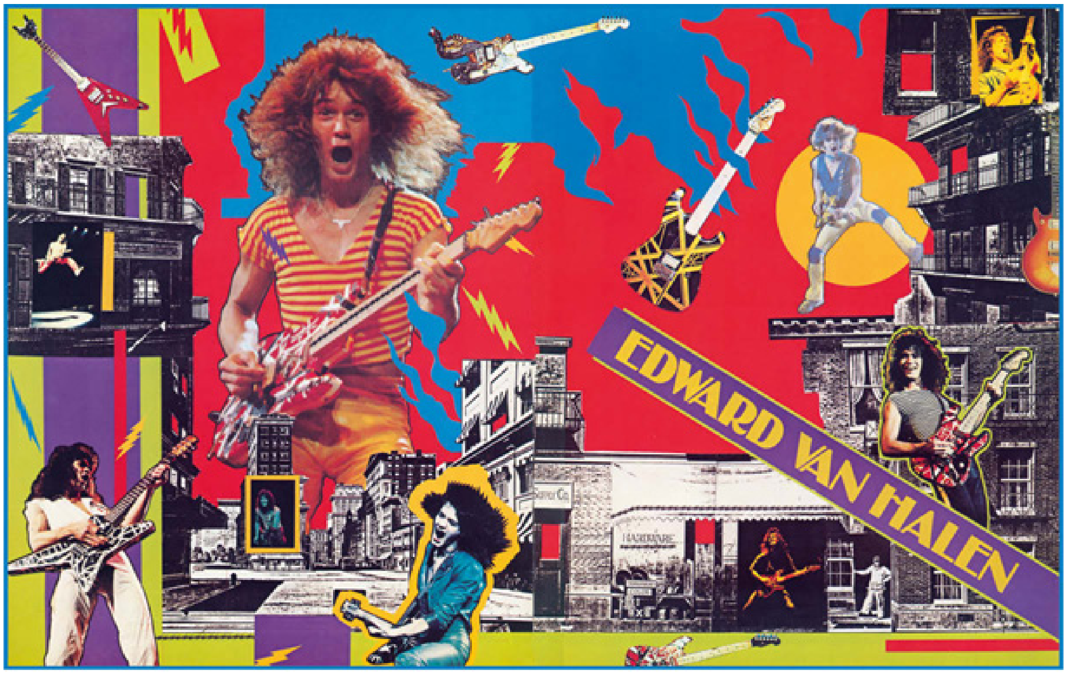


The final printed poster was included in the 1978 solo album for Ace Frehley.

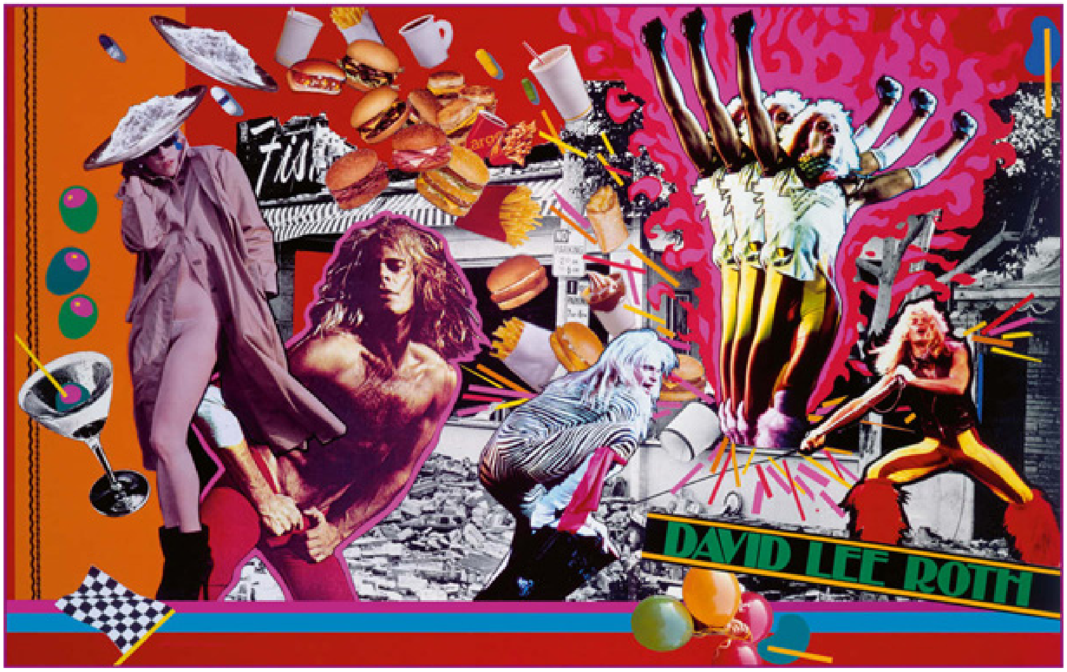


The final printed poster was included in the 1978 solo album for Peter Criss.

LOS ANGELES



EDWARD VAN HALEN



DAVID LEE ROTH

These collages of Eddie Van Halen (top) and David Lee Roth (bottom) were from the 1981 Van Halen Fair Warning tour book.

1980–2022

After a decade in New York City, the drugs, booze, and lifestyle finally catch up with Byrd. He moves to Los Angeles, but finds himself “scratching for feed,” as his East Coast style gets little respect in glitzy LA. The few months are rocky, but Byrd soon finds salvation in sunshine, rehab, and a new lifelong partner.

Robert von Goeben: Before we talk about your move to California in 1980, let’s talk about life in New York City in the late seventies. You once said in New York you had two jobs: one was your actual job, and one was surviving in New York City.

David Edward Byrd: Yeah, right, definitely. Illustration versus violence.

RVG: What were you doing right before you moved to California?

DEB: I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was out of control. In 1976, I started going to Cocaine Anonymous and then AA. I would dry out, but I couldn’t live without amphetamines, so I would gingerly take them like aspirin. I would tell myself how much better a little speed every two or three hours was than vodka and water around the clock. I was so severely depressed that I did not want to create art anymore. It’s like you don’t know you’re depressed, but you are in need of medication to ease your mental and physical pain. There were episodes like waking up in a three-piece suit on the sidewalk lying facedown during rush hour. But I’d just get up and go home on the subway and make a proper martini, smoke a reefer, and take a

Valium. That would make this relaxed addict feel like a normal middle-class male ready to view the nightly news.

RVG: Waking up on the sidewalk … wow. Was that just another night on the town?

DEB: This was just the end of a working day! I just went home and then drank some more or crashed. I can't remember the ends of a lot of these moments. But an almost final moment was around '79. I had gotten into opium with the photographers in my neighborhood, who were all very chic and *la la*, and they loved opium. So, I got to love opium. But opium is not usually around on the market for very long, and when it runs low it gets really, really expensive. That's when a schmo like me had to switch to heroin, but I never mainlined. I always just skin-popped or snorted. I was into skin-popping every day, just to wake up. Next, I went on methadone to kick heroin.

One time in 1979, I had gotten my methadone, and I went to a neighborhood bar on Sixth Avenue in the late afternoon. The next thing I know, I came to, and the entire crew of the bar is in my loft, and I'm in bed, and I don't know what happened. Then all these people told me I tried to destroy the bar, and they had to calm me down with more cheap Chablis. I have no recollection of this event, as I was in a total blackout. No recollection of it at all. And I thought, *Goddamn, I could have murdered somebody!* I mean, this is serious shit. I was really finally impressed by how fucked up I was. But it wasn't until later that I realized I was that fucked up every day of my life for the last three years! So I thought, I gotta get outta Dodge. I gotta get out … I know I will die if I stay! It got worse and worse, and then I saw a picture of myself, and it was horrifying. I had big black circles around my eyes, and I was yellow. I was yellow! Everybody else was flesh colored, and I was yellow because I knew my liver was fucked. At the time, I didn't realize I had hepatitis C, and that's why I would keep having hepatitis, even though I had been vaccinated against hepatitis A and B. They didn't know about hepatitis C until the late 1980s! Of course, my bottle of vodka a day didn't help my very enlarged liver.

RVG: So, did you want to keep the party going, or was it just self-medicating for depression and anxiety?

DEB: I had to medicate myself. I wondered, *Why do I have to use these chemicals to live?* But my immediate answer would be, *No, I can't do without these chemicals; I can't make it.* I would think stupid shit like that while chugging my malt beverage. I just needed to feel that "ping" when whatever drug it was hit its mark.

RVG: But the environment of New York *did* have something to do with you leaving, right?

DEB: Oh, absolutely. It had everything to do with it. I was living alone by this time, since my two loft mates, my lover of twelve years, Jon Shaheen, and my friend and final agent, Mark Golderman, had all left due to the impossibility of my behavior. I was not paying bills, reading mail, or answering the phone. I was in bed in an empty five-thousand-square-foot loft with a bottle of vodka. Sometimes I could not make it to the bathroom and just passed out on the floor and came to in a large pool of urine—not a pretty picture!

RVG: So if they all split, who was left to hang out with?

DEB: I knew all these druggers; in a way they were like my family. All these screwy people who were really fucked up. They were my lifeline to drugs.

RVG: Who was one super fucked-up character that you remember vividly?

DEB: It was either my amphetamine dealer or my heroin and methadone dealer; I can't remember which. They were both in pretty bad shape, but I would always spend time with them. I always thought they were so cool. Once I stopped by my speed dealer's apartment, and it was ankle deep in to-go cartons. There was a skinny young guy in the corner, and, my god, it was just like a junkie scene in a movie. I ended up having sex with the skinny guy on top of all the garbage on the floor while waiting for the dealer's return with more speed. My heroin dealer was a Latino student from a class I was teaching at the School of Visual Arts on Twenty-Third Street. He was married with kids and lived on the Upper West Side in a really big apartment. But he had abscesses from his skin-pops, as well as vein infections. His wife was really sweet and didn't want him to be such a hustler and junkie. He would always bring me art supplies that he and his gang stole from the back of delivery trucks. You know, I would get a new drawing table and Luxo lamps in the middle of the night. That's what it was like. I was so close to both these dudes at the time, but today I can hardly even remember their names. I felt like I was in Sartre's play *No Exit*: "Hell is other people."

RVG: Shit. Were you getting any work done during this period?

DEB: Yes, I was getting bits and pieces of work done. The last Broadway poster I created in Manhattan was for *But Never Jam Today*, the Black musical version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. I remember I was adding a hand-drawn type to the piece when two illustrator friends showed up with fresh cocaine—which I did not want to snort, but soon gave in to my weakness for the powder, alas. Regardless, looking now at *But Never Jam Today*, I would say this poster was pretty damn good. I wouldn't sneer at it today. But I did fail to deliver on my very last New York publishing job, a murder mystery book cover for Ace Books. The art director was *extremely* furious. He had never had an artist, a respected artist nonetheless, fail to produce for him. And I just said, "Gee, I'm sorry; I just didn't get to it." A piss-poor excuse, I must admit. I kept daring myself to cross the "fuck-up line" and not deliver a job by saying that. I was angry at New York, and I was being evicted from my loft at 17 West Seventeenth Street, which was becoming a fancy condo.

RVG: Let's go back to your partner of twelve years that left you. What happened there?

DEB: He moved out due to my increasingly hellacious indiscretions. Jon was my only lover in the time I lived in New York. His family was rather upset that Jon was gay, but his minister brother was the one most upset by

Jon's sexual orientation. It's ironic, because much later he had a son that turned out to be gay and contacted me to find out about Jon's gay life. One time, Jon brought me home to meet "the folks" in Chevy Chase, Maryland, where they lived in a perfect suburban American bubble. The parents were perfectly nice, and I felt I had passed the fiancé test! This was several years after we had met, before my first rehab.

RVG: What was the final straw?

DEB: It was the experience of my first rehab. That morning I got up with a hangover, so I began to drink from a bottle of Chartreuse liqueur and decided I should paint all the radiators in bright colors. By the time I was done with one radiator, I had finished most of the bottle and realized I could never stop drinking on my own. I somehow found a rehab somewhere in Brooklyn, which cost five hundred dollars. That meant I had to walk all the way down to Myrtle Avenue to the savings bank to get the money. I was so smashed that the fifteen-minute walk took me an hour. The rehab was an old-school detox joint where almost everyone had cirrhosis or huge, swollen spleens hangin' over their waist. I was unable to stop screaming and crying until the attendant shot me up with four hundred milligrams of Valium. The stay there showed me the horrors of acute addiction, an effect that only lasted about a month. When I came home from this ordeal, Jon rejected me sexually and physically, and for me the love affair was over. I wish he could have accepted me as I was at that time, but he could not do it. I think I understand his rejection of me now—I think he was just in shock over the event. I was in shock as well—just being in the grimy old rehab hospital somewhere in the wilds of Brooklyn with a gang of street junkies and alkies. Ultimately, he rose up at *GQ* as I fell down the rabbit hole of self-destruction. Jon liked drugs, but he was not a druggie like me. He was very prepared to run a major magazine, and his *GQ* art director, Harry Coulianos, was his champion. His drug and sex life never interfered with his work. He unfortunately died of AIDS in a Lutheran hospice in Philadelphia around 1989. I miss him a great deal, and I apologize for not making him part of the AIDS Quilt. I visited him at the hospice in Philly before he died, and we made peace with each other and ourselves—but speaking about this fills me with turmoil, sadness, and regret.

RVG: So, moving to California was getting away from the city, but also about ending this relationship?

DEB: Yes, I did it very abruptly. I just turned my back on New York. I left everything there—all my framed art, paintings, everything. I was in California, and it was just me, my portfolio, a toothbrush, and $548 in cash. I could barely remember my name at that time, I'm embarrassed to say. What a tortuous time this was. I was starting from zero. Somehow, I had the good sense to create eight-by-ten-inch professional transparencies of my work, which I managed not to lose along the way. So I did not have to re-create my portfolio, thank the mighty Zeus! I left some things in storage, but much of my original art was lost, stolen, or destroyed. Today, my original art occasionally shows up on eBay at rather high prices.

RVG: You once told me you went back to New York in the late eighties to find the art you left behind.

DEB: A couple of times. First, my partner, Jolino, went back on his own to clean out the basement of my last house in a rough section of Brooklyn. He found some art that was valuable, such as the original drawings for *Follies* and *Godspell*. Also, I had a storage locker in Brooklyn, but when we opened it up, everything was pretty much done in, except for one big Metropolitan Opera poster.

RVG: Like water damaged?

DEB: Yes. So I gave the opera poster to my longtime Manhattan friend Dorianne Beyer, and it hangs in her apartment today. It was a poster for Beverly Sills's final performance at the Met in *Don Pasquale* by Donizetti.

RVG: When you moved, did you still own property in New York, or were you just renting at the time?

DEB: In the very last days, I was just renting a room in the basement of a town house in Brooklyn owned by a former illustration student from Pratt. I had no savings, no credit cards, and $548 to my name. But just when it all came to a head, I got the call from Van Halen's manager, Noel Monk. I had known Noel from Bill Graham's Fillmore East, where he was the stage manager for a short time, and he asked me to come to Los Angeles to work on the Van Halen's 1981 Fair Warning Tour.

RVG: Where did you live when you moved out to LA?

DEB: I stayed with Harriet Beck in Van Nuys. She was a school chum from Miami Beach. We met in kindergarten, and she was my lawyer right up until her death in 2022 from a mysterious illness that took her quickly. I still go to call her and then realize she's gone forever. Rest in peace, my little lady and dear friend. After moving to LA, I tried to put on some weight because I had gotten very skinny from all the drinking and drug activity. In New York, I had been drinking about a case of beer a day, but that didn't help fatten me up; it just made me skinnier, I think. I didn't have any drug connections in the West, though I was on eighty milligrams of methadone from a clinic in the San Fernando Valley. I had started methadone in New York City before I left for Los Angeles. I didn't know anybody in LA except for former student Tom Nikosey, who gave me an eleven-inch portable television with rabbit ears, bless his heart! Now I had a TV, but I didn't have any work. So Harriet, being in the legal end of the animation business, started sending me around to people she knew at Hanna-Barbera and other studios and agencies. I got a freelance job here and a freelance job there so I could eat.

RVG: Talk about getting sober after you moved to LA.

DEB: It was at this time that I met my life partner, Jolino Beserra, and he was a great help in keeping me straight. It took time. I was on methadone for eight years, and it was really tough getting off that very last opiate. I mean, it's like smack, but one becomes tolerant to methadone. You become tolerant, then you don't feel it anymore; you only feel it if you don't have it. So you have to get used to not being high anymore. That was the toughest part. I really missed getting that opiate high—which is the best high in the world.

RVG: Was there something about getting clean in California that you responded to, versus trying it in New York?

DEB: In LA, it was good because there were fewer people hanging about the clinic in those days. Also, I got more attention from the drug therapist at the LA clinic. He became a close friend and then helped me get off methadone completely. I didn't like getting off methadone—down to one fucking milligram! I kept thinking, *Well, I'm not dead*. Looking back, I was refusing to kill myself, which I was certainly doing in New York. Back there, every time I would feel I had conquered addiction, I would walk right back into it. The problem with being a recovering addict is when you slip back, you need to go on a bender and consume all the drinks and drugs you have missed during your sobriety. Plus, in New York, you need a mental map of decent restrooms all over town! [*laughs*]

RVG: You were in New York for so long—this dark, crowded, drug-infested place. Then you go to California, which is wide open, bright, a different culture, and a different mindset. California in the eighties was very granola. Did it just blow your mind?

DEB: At first I thought it was just horrid! It was too dramatic of a change. I always used to say, "God, you can hear the fucking plants growing!" Los Angeles was so horizontal, and I was used to dark, vertical canyons of concrete. For a year after I arrived there, I kept an open ticket with American Airlines back to New York. Then gradually, I sort of got over the whole thing about horizontality, because I realized it was a place you could actually have a yard and dogs. Now I've come to adore it, and I could never live in New York again, god, unless I had a billion dollars. I would live there if I had servants, but I do not approve of servants, so that is out of the question. [*laughs*]

RVG: Let's talk about the Van Halen gig.

DEB: As I said, I went out to work with Noel Monk, who was now the manager of the rock group Van Halen. My job was to design the 1981 Fair Warning Tour book. I had known Noel since I moved to New York in the sixties, and we were very close for many years. His father was a dashingly handsome man with slicked-back white hair and an aquiline visage. He owned a well-known pottery store called the Mad Monk, in which Noel worked the counter. I remember that one day when I was visiting Noel at the shop, I was so drunk that I fell into the pottery display, smashing it all! I seem to have fallen down a lot in those days.

RVG: Had Noel Monk ever managed a band before?

DEB: He managed the Sex Pistols' one and only American tour, which manager Malcolm McLaren booked only in the Southern US, probably for the controversy. The only non-Southern city they played was San Francisco, which was their last show. As soon as they had begun the tour, Noel had to chase around after Sid Vicious, one of the guys who was really hooked on smack and needed it badly. He was always running away in some Southern city to find heroin. But the show would have to go on, and Neil would find him and drag him back, and then he would get drunk, do the show, and then run off again in search of the ever-elusive fix. And then the police, you know, the police in Birmingham, Alabama—I mean, really! Atlanta, oh god. Houston! I mean, really! It was funny, but it was kind of scary. I am from the South and find it miraculous they were not murdered!

RVG: Would he tell stories of that tour?

DEB: Oh god, yes! He kept it together because they were just crazed! Noel was crazy! That's why he got called to do that tour, because he's the only guy who knew how to hold together crazy people. And that's what he basically did with Van Halen for six years.

RVG: Was it a full-time employee thing or just a freelance gig?

DEB: It was a freelance gig, and he paid me about ten thousand dollars, which was a lot of money for me at the time. The Van Halen team worked together in the tower of the Berwin Entertainment Complex, which was and is again today the Hollywood Athletic Club. It was exciting to be with a group that was about to explode onto the world music scene, though I was not aware of that at the time. I had a little desk in the conference room where we would have meetings about costumes, sets, and lighting. Occasionally, David Lee Roth would stop by and put his pinky with the one-inch nail up to my nose for some afternoon refreshment. We often got in Alex Van Halen's Jeep and went to Pinks for their fabulous chili dogs. But my favorite guy was Chip "Chipper" Monck, the droll Aussie in charge of lighting. He was, of course, the emcee at the 1969 Woodstock Music Festival as well as the lighting designer. We had a wonderful three-hour lunch at Don the Beachcomber with a plethora of tropical drinks and pu pu platters. When we got back to the Berwin, we were all aglow, and David Lee had to hit us with a couple of pinky nails!

RVG: The first day you went into the band office and you saw Noel, the band, and the environment, what was going through your mind? What did you think when you walked in?

DEB: Well, number one, I was very surprised they had already gotten gold records. I never even heard of these people, and no one in New York that I knew had ever heard of these people! They said to me, "Oh cool, you're going to work for Van Morrison, right?" But that's the difference between the East Coast and the West Coast. Everything gets around on the West Coast; you immediately know what's hot. What I really thought was, *Ooh, this is amazing! These are serious people, and they're making money, even being crazy*. So I felt very much at home and did the tour book, which I based on one of the California earthquakes. Noel, who was no stranger to rock tours, has written that he thought my Van Halen tour program was one of the best he had ever seen. So that was good, and I decided I was just gonna stay in Los Angeles until further notice.

RVG: Were you surprised at how together Van Halen was business-wise? Was that unlike bands you had known in New York?

DEB: Oh yeah, Van Halen was very, very together. I had no idea what it was like to be in the production of a big rock concert tour, but their manager, Noel, was very together. He was very strict with them, because he had to be. He also seemed financially good for them; he put all their money into Krugerrands [South African gold coins]. He was kind of crazy about gold. He was also a rabid gun collector, which I never approved of. I am totally against firearms of any sort. Noel was a very insecure and angry guy underneath, but very fun to be with.

RVG: Did you get on well with the band?

DEB: David Lee Roth was hysterical. He used to come by my desk every day about 3:30 pm. He had the pinky nail I told you about, and he would stick it in my nose for "the pause that refreshes"!

RVG: So how would you characterize Eddie Van Halen?

DEB: He was very shy, and kind of soft-spoken. I know he had this girlfriend who was an actress, Valerie Bertinelli. At the time I didn't know much about her. But while I was there, they got married. They had a big wedding party at Grayhall, a mansion in Beverly Hills that could be rented for large events. David Lee Roth's father had a band, and they played at the reception.

RVG: Like a jazz band?

DEB: Yeah, jazz. He was a jazz guy. At least, I think so. I'm pretty sure, 'cause it was a lot of ancient songs that I liked. But anyway, yeah, it was a crazy time, and I really enjoyed it because I never knew what was going to happen.

RVG: Did you go on tour with the band?

DEB: No, but I saw them at Madison Square Garden.

RVG: What did you think?

DEB: I'd never seen a huge stadium show where everyone had their BIC lighters lit. I didn't know that was a kind of tribute, especially at a large stadium. Now I think everyone uses their cell phone's flashlight. [*laughs*]

RVG: Compare the old Fillmore shows to Van Halen. They seemed to take it to the next level with the lights and the stage and everything.

DEB: I was very impressed. David Lee Roth was a commanding presence. The audience just was crazy for the group, which makes *you* feel crazy for them in a way. As far as the music, you know, I can't tell you any songs that they recorded; I wasn't really into that kind of music. I was moving on from rock … or was rock moving on from me?

RVG: After Van Halen you went back to freelance, right? How did that go?

DEB: Not well. I wasn't making any money. When I went to Los Angeles from New York in the eighties, it seemed like a big mistake. I went to interview after interview, and the art directors kept saying, "Oh, your work is great, but it's so New York." I started getting these little jobs, like black-and-white drawings on "how to heat an eggroll" or "how to use an ATM" or whatever. You know, looking for any kind of work I could get. In New York, I was so well known for having done the *Follies* Broadway poster, but Californians hated this show. They just did not get it! I think it closed early at the Shubert in Century City, alas. Other art directors would ask for things like, "Can you give me a sample piece of hamburgers and fries?" Everybody wanted hamburgers or fast food. I wasn't exactly being artistically challenged.

RVG: You had done all this work for the Fillmore and Broadway in the sixties and seventies. Was it too close in time to be iconic?

DEB: People were like, "Who cares?" They thought the work was great, but it was, "Don't call us; we'll call you." You know, "What have you done for us yesterday?" I liked being totally immersed in art, and it wasn't happening. And the movie agencies did *not* take to my work *at all*.

RVG: Were you still getting work from New York?

DEB: Yeah, I still had some contacts there. I got a job from New York creating the poster for *Little Shop of Horrors*, which came through Albert

Poland, for whom I had done two Sam Shepard plays. He hired me, and it went over well. Then I started freelancing at an ad agency of a friend of Harriet's.

RVG: Were you taking just any job at this point?

DEB: I was like a chicken scratching for feed. I did one job for Scientology, it was a cover for something called *The Way to Happiness*, one of L. Ron Hubbard's great masterpieces. [*laughs*] It was a road with the sun and the mountains and the trees. It was just generic. I think they thought my design was a little too psychedelic. Myself, I would call it a downright terrible piece of crap!

RVG: They didn't use it?

DEB: I really don't know, but I sincerely hope not. There was a Scientology person working pasteup at this ad agency, so the job came through him.

RVG: Was there a lot of that nutty shit going on in LA at the time?

DEB: Sure, LA has got that side in spades! I started working freelance at places where I knew a lot of crazy people who were running agencies; it was all kind of nutty. A lot of cocaine and tequila were part of the mix, but I refused the offerings—trying to stay sober, as it were.

RVG: And what did you think of all that, coming from New York?

DEB: Nothing like that usually happened in New York, but I've gotta admit that in New York, I was cornered by the EST [Erhard Seminars Training] people and was kept hostage for an entire day! I was at an "EST Coffee" at this beautiful Chelsea apartment, and the hosts were trying to get me to spend three hundred dollars for this EST seminar where you weren't allowed to use the bathroom or that kind of thing. They weren't gonna take no for an answer, so I had to just sit there and say no all day. I should have just walked out, but I knew a lot of these people, and EST was one of the latest cultural gizmos. For me, evangelism is a disgusting thing!

RVG: Around this time, you met your life partner, Jolino Beserra, who you're still with after forty years. How did you meet Jolino?

DEB: Actually, I went to my neighborhood bar, the One Bar, and he aggressively chased me around. [*laughs*]

RVG: You were forty?

DEB: I was forty. He was, like, twenty-three, so young and very cute! Just a Mexican kid from Temple City. He had just graduated from ArtCenter and had just lost a hundred pounds. I said immediately, "I'm not ready for any kind of relationship. I mean, let's just be friends," blah, blah, blah, but he wasn't gonna accept that. You know, we would discuss it, but he kept after me for us to live together. I was living in this apartment on Orange Street with a Murphy bed, so my life was not too glam. So then I sent Jolino to New York, and he got all my clothes and other stuff. Jolino had a little bungalow in Tujunga that his father owned, so we stayed there for a while and then got an apartment together over in East Hollywood. One time, Jolino and I went to Florida to stay at my dad's condominium, which was good. He had an extra condo there. It's funny; they never asked about Jolino and me being a couple. I mean, it was obvious that he wasn't a woman, and we were sleeping in the same bed! All the same, my rather stupid stepmother said to him, "Well, you'll be very happy to know that we do not allow any Hispanics here." She had no idea he was Hispanic. She seemed to think he was Italian. And we never mentioned it.

RVG: How did he change your life?

DEB: Well, he wasn't a drinker, and he didn't take cocaine. He was just an artist guy straight from art school, and we got along very well. I still was not ready for this whole thing, but eventually I gave in. I was no longer drinking or drugging, the most I was on was Tylenol. [*laughs*] Staying in LA, not returning to New York, and sticking with him was definitely my new agenda. Then we started to do work for the same advertising agency, and we grew even closer.

RVG: You grew up in the fifties, did the sixties trip, then the whole seventies thing in New York. How did you see things were changing in the eighties?

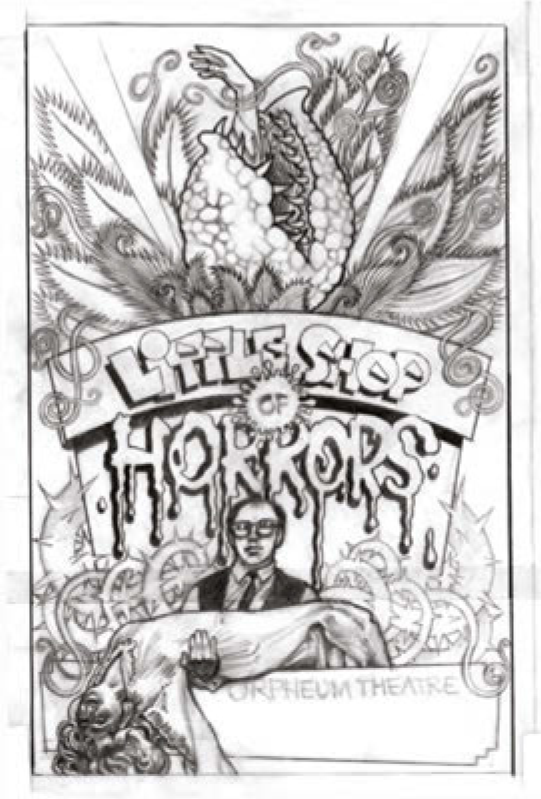
DEB: The zeitgeist seemed to really change a lot; you're very right about that. Especially in LA, which didn't have the killer side that New York had. In those days, New York was pretty much a trash heap. So even though LA seemed like a real backwater at the time, it was a big relief to feel like a regular gay man in the middle of his life. You know, I didn't have any guns to my head.

RVG: And less hedonistic?

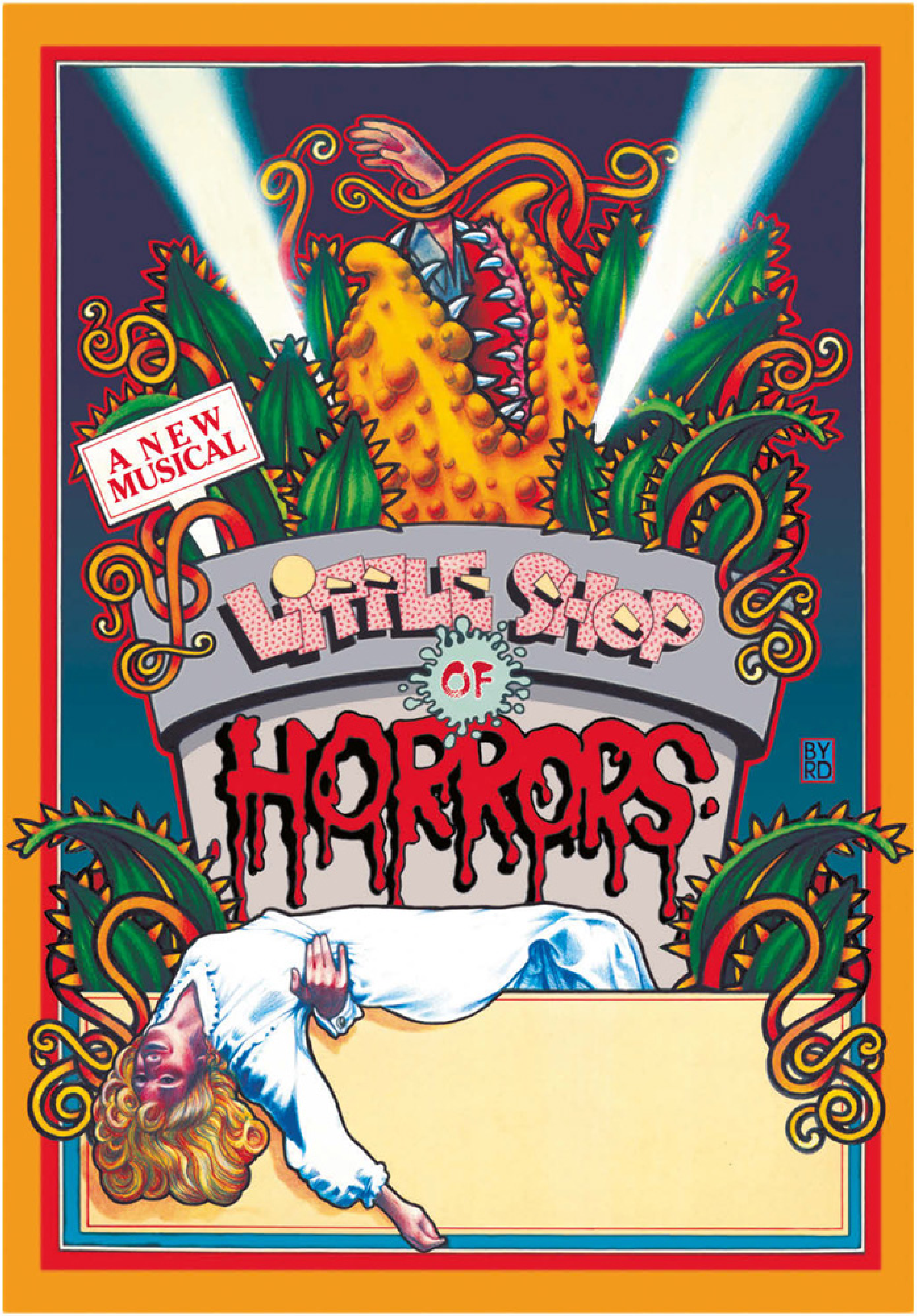
DEB: Oh yeah, I didn't know anybody, and Jolino didn't really know anybody except people he went to school with. And, like me, he was a real dog-rescue person, which was very attractive to me. We started with Joshua, an Airedale, and now have a house full of dogs and a cabinet full of dog ashes.

RVG: As you settled into domestic tranquility, were you doing any rock-and-roll work at all?

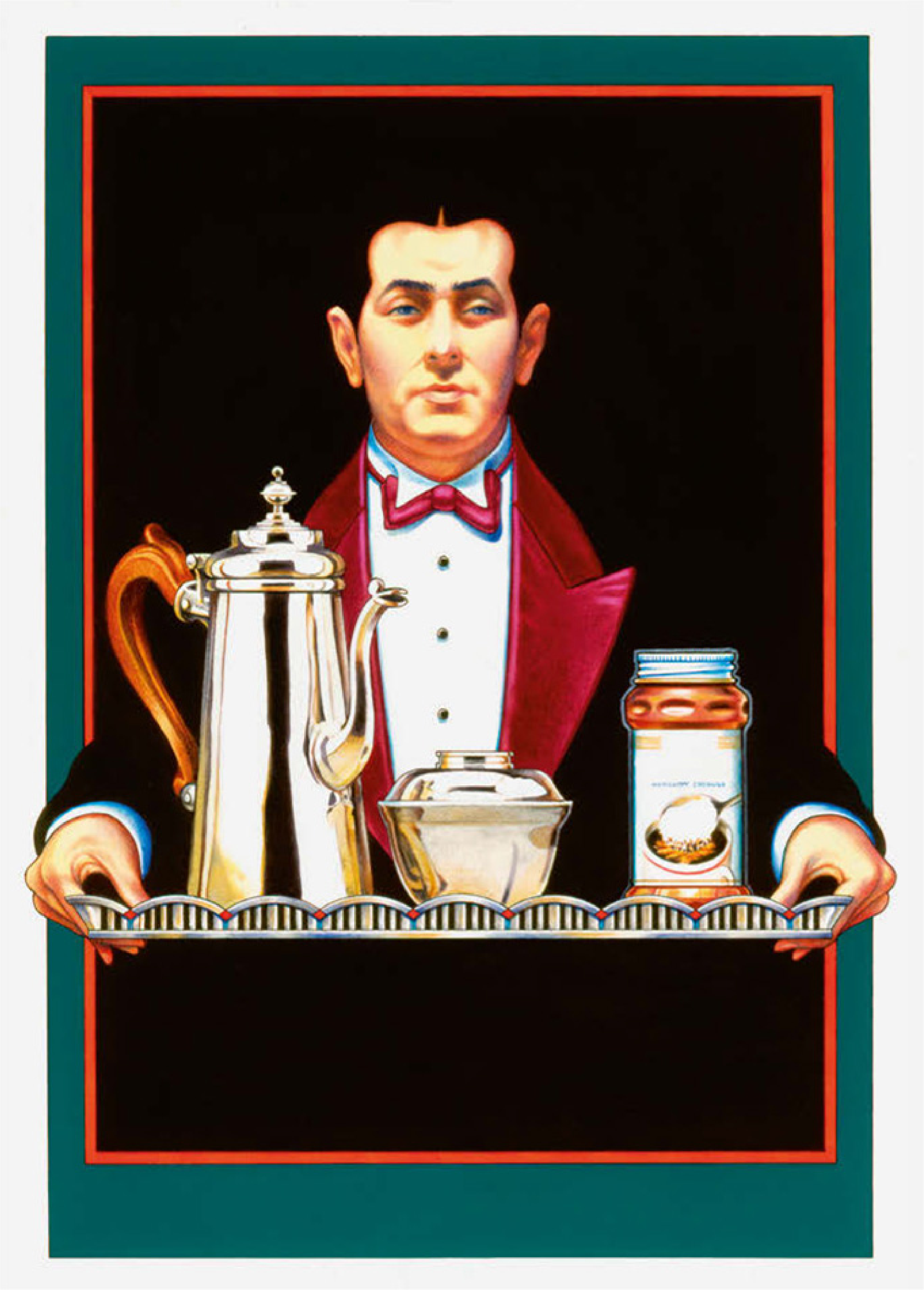
DEB: Very little, and soon after I got an offer to become the art director of *The Advocate*, the gay news magazine. Actually, *The Gay Advocate*, as it was called at that time. It had started in San Francisco in the sixties as a tabloid, and now they were moving the whole operation to Los Angeles. They hired me to turn it from a tabloid newspaper into a standard eight-and-a-half-by-eleven glossy magazine. My first issue was still a tabloid, but it had a glossy cover, and the sex ads were still in the back. After that, we got rid of the sex ads and put them in a separate magazine, and then I was able to do cover stories and whatever. Eventually, we went to publishing fortnightly, every two weeks. That turned out to be just too frantic for the new me, and soon I said, "Well, I don't think I can keep doing this." Plus, I had done what I was hired to do. The magazine, meanwhile, moved to fancy new offices across from Grauman's Chinese on Hollywood Boulevard. I remember going to their fortieth anniversary party, and I didn't know a person there. There were like starlets and starboys and paparazzi and eight-dollar water and I felt very old hat, which I was, Blanche! It was all so party-planned la-di-da.


Little Shop
of
Horrors
ORPHEUM THEATRE

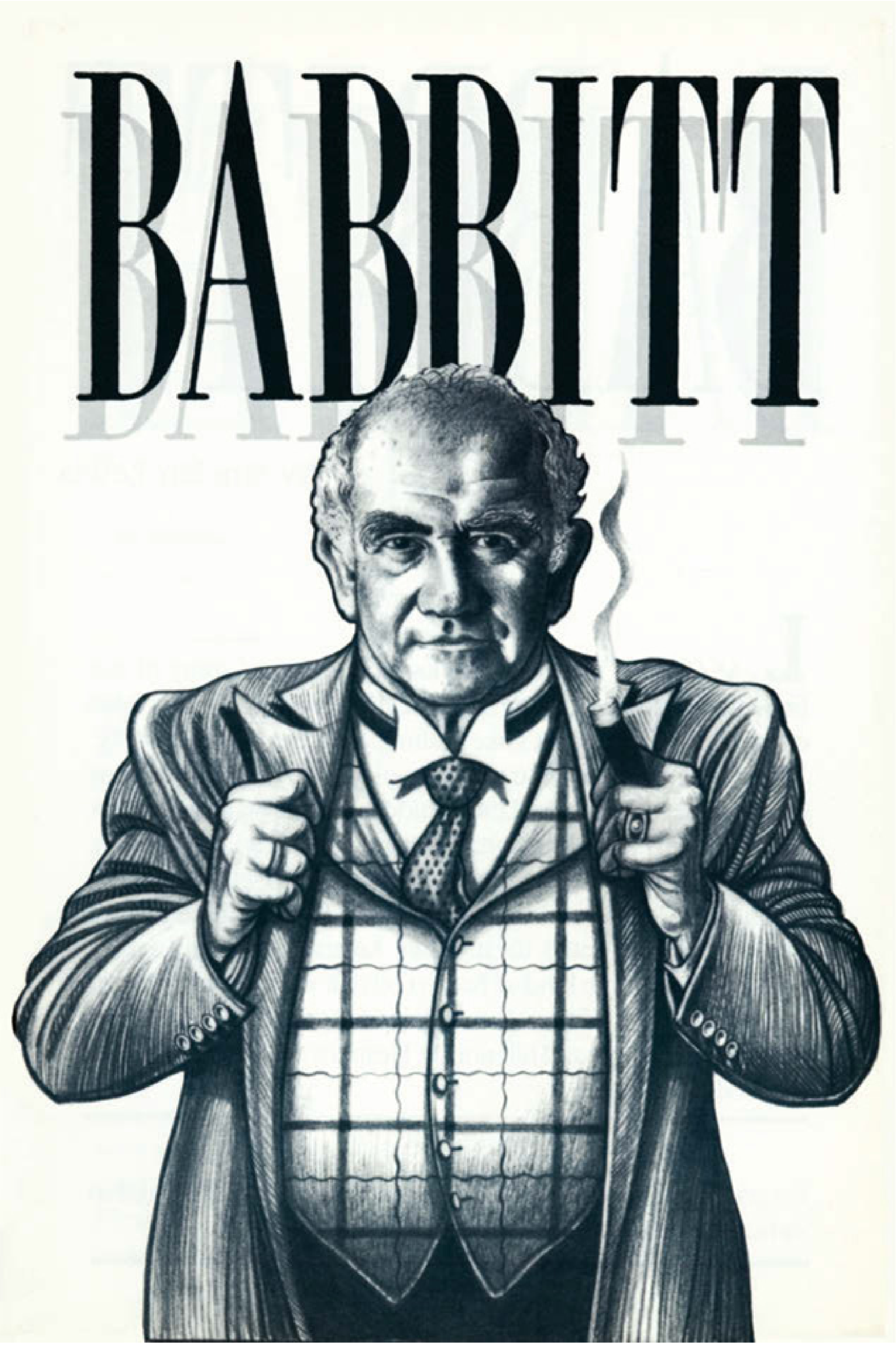
Preliminary sketch for the 1982 debut of the musical Little Shop of Horrors


A NEW MUSICAL
LITTLE SHOP
OF
HORRORS
BY RD

For the final design of this 1982 poster for Little Shop of Horrors, *Byrd was asked to remove the character of Seymour Krelborn* *(holding the body), but the hand was left in to make the poster more ominous*.



Byrd created this 1989 illustration for his portfolio. After his move to Los Angeles in 1981, Byrd realized he needed product illustrations in his portfolio to secure advertising agency work.



Byrd did this illustration for a 1987 radio production of the Sinclair Lewis classic Babbitt. *He was hired by producer Judith*

Auberjonois, the wife of actor René Auberjonois, who was in the play. They had both attended Carnegie Tech with Byrd. This groundbreaking performance was broadcast over fourteen and a half hours on Thanksgiving Day and featured a stellar cast.

RVG: What was the gay community like in Los Angeles, and how was it different from New York?

DEB: There was a lot of leather, but it did not seem so ominous in the eternal sunshine. It was different in different neighborhoods. If you were into leather, you lived in Silver Lake; if you were into blow-drying your hair, you were in West Hollywood. That has all changed by now, I am sure!

RVG: Do you remember when you first heard about AIDS?

DEB: Oh, my goodness, yeah. I first got a message from my former boyfriend in New York that we had lost a good friend, Ronald, who was a wonderful illustrator, to “gay cancer.” It was actually called “gay cancer” at first, and then it was called GRID: Gay-Related Immunodeficiency Disease. Soon after, we had so many friends die; it was devastating. Jolino became an APLA Buddy with the APLA Health organization. He would get an AIDS patient as his buddy, and he would spend time with him, drive him to his doctor, take him for medications, and so on. He did this because he didn’t want to be afraid of the virus. Almost everybody I knew, gay or not, was spooked. Nongays were especially hysterical!

RVG: How spooked were you?

DEB: Well, it was always in the back of my mind, and I was waiting for the Kaposi’s sarcoma [a cancer common in AIDS patients] or some other physical sign to show up. But I was not, at that time, slutty or having sex with anyone but Jolino. So many people I knew were not cautious, and many of them would later die. It was very scary, because AIDS was not one disease; it was many diseases that all seemed to end in death. We had a lot of friends who were sick, and we would do round-robins in the hospital, and we helped their partners physically and emotionally through their deaths. That took up a lot of our everyday life.

RVG: Did you notice the culture change from promiscuity to relationships?

DEB: It definitely did, and we got a lot more comments on how smart it was that we were in a committed relationship. And we didn't really screw around, so we were able to avoid AIDS as well as STDs.

RVG: Was that part of your incentive to want to get into a relationship? Or was that just an extra benefit?

DEB: At heart, I am what you might call a sentimental nester. The safety from AIDS was an extra benefit, just gravy.

RVG: What did you do after the *Advocate*?

DEB: It was back to freelance. My friend Richard Amsel got me into *TV Guide*, and I did that until the art director, Jerry Alton, retired. I did a bunch of cover portraits. It wasn't my forte, but it paid really well. In those days, it was $2,500 a cover, which was a lot in the eighties. I think my last cover was 1989. But it was weird because I had just worked for a gay newspaper, and people weren't too thrilled about that. So I didn't mention it when I went around looking for jobs. I never showed the *Advocate* art because it was gay, and gay people were personae non gratae—in Hollywood, of all places! The entire time I spent at the helm of this magazine, we were never able to land a liquor advert. "Gays don't drink" was their message. I just figured that this is the way of the world. You can't be gay; it just doesn't work. But the people I worked with at ad agencies and such, they knew I was gay. It was strange! But you know, eventually things changed. And here we are.

RVG: How did that make you feel; it's the late eighties, and you can't talk about or show your work because it was for a gay magazine?

DEB: I didn't feel good about it, so I just kept a low profile. It was similar to the experience when I was interviewing for a job at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh in the mid-sixties. They wanted me to tell them I was gay. They said to me, "There's something you're not telling us." It was like being grilled by the police. I said, “What do you mean, something I’m not telling you? What is this thing you think I am not telling you?” Finally, I left there with them saying, “You’re not being truthful, and we have young people coming here to study, and we have to be very careful about who takes charge of them. Thank you very much, goodbye.”

RVG: Wow.

DEB: Yeah. Right? “We have young people who are coming here, and you’re just ill.” Being gay was considered a disease at this time. A disease with which, at this time, I definitely suffered. So yeah, I didn’t show any of my *Advocate* work. I don’t think I even put it on my résumé. I thought it was poisonous. The work was good, so what was it? It was me who was the problem. You know, I talk funny. I look funny. I act funny. Funny means gay, and gay means bad. That’s the way it was for me—never comfortable in my own skin.

RVG: So, by the time the early nineties came, were you almost accustomed to that being the attitude?

DEB: Well, I always got good reactions from art directors in Los Angeles. But I got very little work. So, you know, “How great to meet you. Blah, blah, blah.” I was drawing hamburgers, vertical blinds, feminine hygiene products, and nuclear families for insurance companies.

RVG: So, then you went to Warner Bros. How did that job come about?

DEB: In 1991, Warner Bros. asked my friend Ed Wleczyk, who now lives in San Antonio, to be senior illustrator at Warner Bros. Consumer Products. He called me and said he didn’t want to do it, but did I want it? I said, “Well, I’ll go for the interview.” They needed me more than I thought. When has this ever happened to me?

RVG: Warner Bros. didn’t have the same attitude about you being gay?

DEB: I worked for the art director of consumer products; he didn't give a shit. He hired me on the spot.

RVG: You had a good relationship with him?

DEB: Oh yes, we worked together every day, and he was a real type A person. He was driven, the kind of person who would send you a thank-you note for your thank-you note. He would talk about his thirty-five suits and his 120 dress shirts and the house he designed for Rod Stewart with the retractable roof. But then he crossed somebody higher up at Warner Bros. and got replaced. There was a big fight about his firing, and everybody was taking sides. I tried to not go against him, but then he went crazy on me. I recommended my tax guy to him, who somehow offended him, so he got crazy and went ballistic on me, and then he got fired. Shortly after this he died of a massive coronary occlusion. So much for 120 dress shirts.

RVG: What specifically was the job at Warner Bros.?

DEB: The job was senior illustrator/designer at WBCP: Warner Bros. Consumer Products. We were the go-to people for when you were creating, say, a Bugs Bunny whoopie cushion. [*laughs*] Anything you thought the public would buy. It was amazing what licensees would try to put the art on. But at that time, there were no character style guides. I was the second person hired, so we had to get all these artists from the animation side to come on board and develop character designs. Suddenly, we were high above Warner Bros. in this tower just off the Warner's lot. We had to work really fast in order to keep up with Disney Consumer Products. I mean, day and night! My first project was working on Tweety. Oh, I came to hate Tweety—a little yellow homunculus based on Bob Clampett's baby picture! But you gotta do what you were hired to do. Clampett was a millionaire while I am just a grouser, alas!

After that first art director, they hired Brenda Guttman. It was the first time they had a woman in such a high place, so she was always on her guard. But she was a champion of all the artists she represented in the department. She and I got on very well, and along with art director Ed Wleczyk, we built the department into a formidable moneymaker for the company. Warner Bros. built a building right across from the main lot, where the Consumer Products division would work. I was charged with getting all the furniture for the artists, plus the art supplies and everything else necessary. I secured these large wooden professional drafting desks. I just went whole hog because they didn't give me a budget. I bought the best, and we had the best. That extended to the staff, who were incredible. Jerome Moore was the greatest draftsman I ever met, just an incredible guy and he could draw anything. I could never draw like he could. Frank Espinosa, who was our character designer, was an amazing man! He redesigned every character and made it so that they were always active and dynamic. Then we developed programs like the Looney Tunes restaurant, where we would have Bugs as the waiter and Daffy Duck as the chef. We created all these programs that our clients could then purchase for their products.

RVG: When you started, if someone wanted to license a character for a product, they had no program or style guide?

DEB: They had one style guide; it was just Bugs facing you, and then Bugs in profile. The drawings were clearly done by someone with meager talent. They were very stiff and amateurish. So Frank redesigned everything on the character list, then hired all these draftspeople who were also character artists of extraordinary talent! And among this crowd, suddenly I was appreciated as an artist. They gave me a studio with an actual sink, and I could close my door! No one else had that. Then, the president of WBCP found out that I had done all these well-known pieces of art, and I suddenly became the cat's meow.

RVG: So was it like, "Holy shit, we got *this* guy?"

DEB: I think so. Visitors to WBCP were brought to my studio, and they would talk about everything. "Oh, you did this?" and "Oh, what happened here?" and then they brought by some people who knew me from my New York City life. "Oh, we loved him in New York," and blah, blah, blah.

RVG: Did you become like part of this tour, with the velvet ropes and all?

DEB: Right. [*laughs*] Then, in our meetings, they would always laugh because I had so many stories about famous people and jobs and doing this and meeting that, and it almost became like a joke, because, you know, I was the only one who was like that. I was a flamboyant addition to an already brilliant team. I considered Warner Bros. to be my real art school education. I got a better art education there than I ever got at Carnegie Tech.

RVG: Explain.

DEB: Well, it was twenty-four hours a day … painting, painting, painting. I was the only one who painted, so they would come to me with line drawings, and I would make them beautifully colored. I did the painting; everybody else drew. That said, near the end of my career at Warners, I did over three hundred style guide drawings for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *Prisoner of Azkaban*.

RVG: Is this when you started to use the computer?

DEB: Yes. I got a Mac computer in 1990, and at night I would work on it. I would learn all these things, like "What is a folder?" Then the Macintosh computers got better and became the choice of artists and art departments all over the map. Later, myself and David Sugg, our IT person, were in charge of getting everybody a Macintosh computer.

RVG: Today, your Photoshop skills are formidable.

DEB: I was not afraid to ask anybody anything or to try to figure it out. I'd sit there at night and do all that tutorial shit, and eventually, you learn the program. I was working on *Free Willy* and doing all these drawings making hair using a mouse. I did it so much my hand and arm would go numb. That's when I got the Wacom tablet. Not everybody would draw with a tablet, and I said, "You've gotta do this 'cause it's gonna save your body." After a while, I got really good on the Wacom tablet, and it saved my arm.

RVG: Did you experience any backlash by traditional artists against the computer?

DEB: Oh yes. Some of the pencil-and-ink draftspeople were somewhat intimidated by the computer. Many of the artists talked to me in private, saying they were afraid that the computer would take away their talent and make their drawings look crappy. They were afraid their drawings would look like they were done by a machine. But I said, “No, it’s another tool. It’s like the brush.” Think about it: a long time ago, a guy got a stick and glued animal hair to the end, and he stuck it in some blood and painted. I said, “Back then, would you have been afraid of the brush, and would you be afraid to move from the brush to the pencil? Or a piece of burned charcoal?” Eventually, they all got computers, and they all learned how to use them in the way that best served their art.

RVG: Do you think they were inspired by the fact that someone of your age and experience was taking to it freely?

DEB: I think so. I’m still in touch with all of them. They’re just amazing people that I am so proud to have worked with for over a decade.

RVG: These folks have gone on to do some pretty amazing things, right?

DEB: Yes, Frank was at MIT and now has his own line of popular comics. Frank came to my show at Pratt when I was part of Pratt’s one-hundredth anniversary. I was chosen as Mr. 1968, and my Jimi Hendrix poster was the example they used.

RVG: So, the team had you, Frank Espinosa, Ed Wleczyk, Jerome Moore, etc.—quite the stellar cast to draw Tweety.

DEB: Oh, many more artists than just them. If you saw the new style guides we created, you would understand.

RVG: I do notice that the work moved the characters from a static setting and into unusual situations.

DEB: Absolutely.

RVG: At the time, was that conscious? Was that just a function of having all these great artists together?

DEB: All of the above, I would say. Frank was the driving force in keeping the characters authentic and dynamic—never stiff or stilted or off-model. It was like a golden age. I didn't know it then, but it was the golden age of Warner Bros. consumer art. At that time, only Disney had a big consumer art department. WB had nothing; bupkes, zilch, zero. So, we had to create it! And we did it very rapidly. Then we started getting these jobs like US postage stamps, which were the first animated characters ever on a postage stamp. We did five for the US Postal Service, starting with Bugs in 1997.

We were always creating ideas. Sara Lee came in, and we did a whole program for their products that everybody worked on for a week. We did a lot of food art with Looney Tunes, you know, a restaurant or deli guide. Another time, I did one with Bugs in drag as Marie Antoinette. There was so much art, and I was working and drawing and painting, and then we opened the Warner Bros. Studio Stores in malls across the nation. That was a huge success, and then studio stores came to me and asked me to do the Looney Tunes Masterpiece Collection.

RVG: Explain what the Masterpiece Collection was.

DEB: I would re-create works like Picasso's *Three Musicians* as *Three Looney Musicians* but with Bugs, Daffy, and Sylvester. I created Bugs as a ballerina in a Degas pastel. I also created an Andy Warhol Batman. I did ten different masterpieces for the studio stores. I recall that every time I created a poster I got a $100 bonus.

RVG: We've talked in the past about your use of classic art references in your Fillmore and Broadway work. So, when they came to you and said, "We need a Picasso or a Degas with Warner Bros. characters," this must've been right up your alley, no?

DEB: Oh yeah, I was all ready for it. I went “kaboom” and just started doing it.

RVG: Did you enjoy it?

DEB: Oh, I loved it! I mean, where else could you spend every day doing this shit? It was much more fun than I thought it would be. I felt lucky that I got into this job. You know, it wasn’t like I was doing this because I needed money. I mean, I did, but I soon got over that.

RVG: If you could sum up your Warner Bros. experience, what did it mean to you and your art?

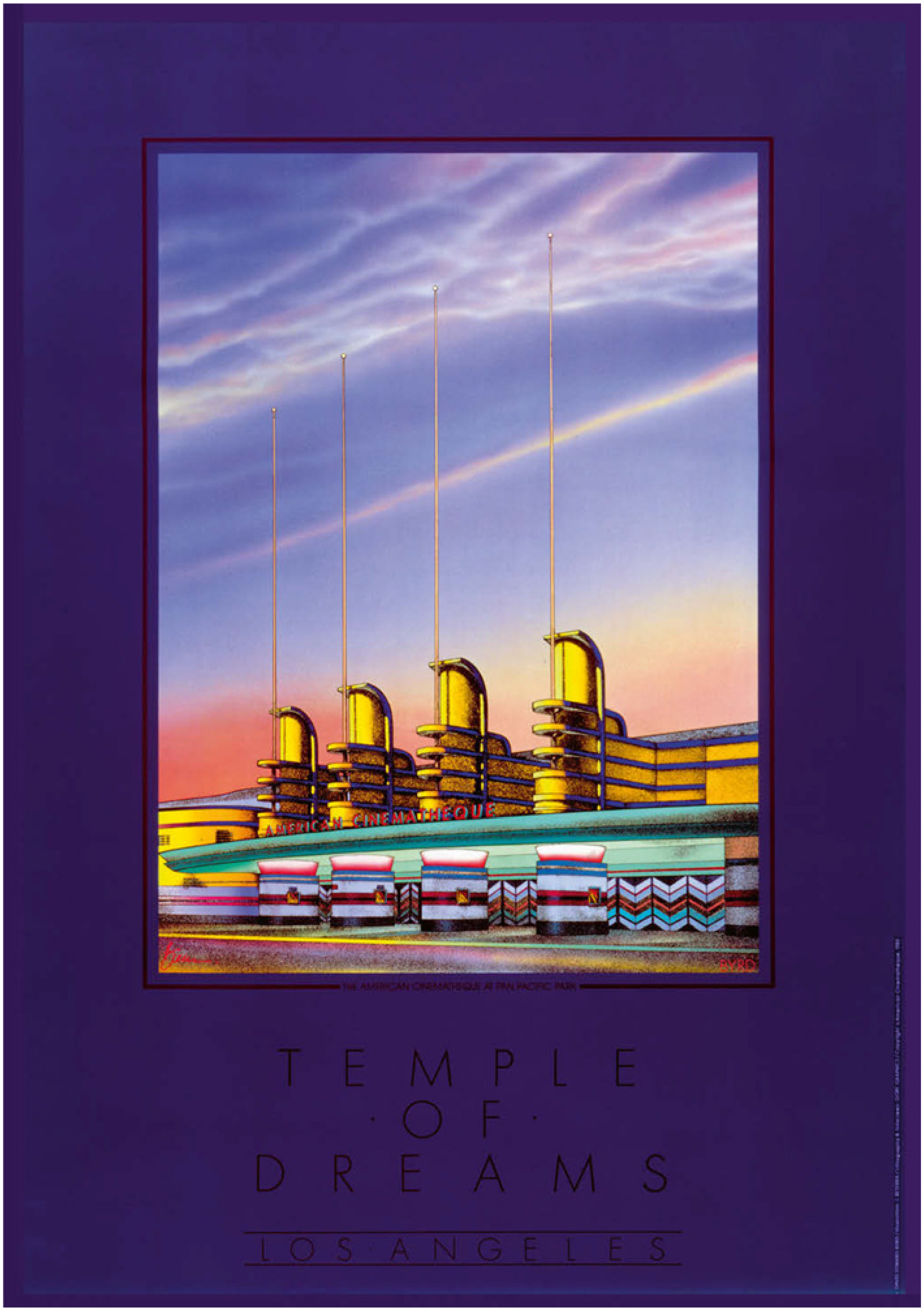
DEB: It was one of the most important times of my life. I felt like I was just very lucky to have had this ten-year experience. I learned everything I needed to continue on in the commercial art world. It was my new art school. Really, I can’t describe it any other way. In my real art school, I learned all the traditional things … how to grind pigment, how to put it in tubes, how to do a fresco. That filled me with amazing joy, but that in itself didn’t get me anywhere. But my years at Warner Bros. gave me an appreciation for how important process is. That’s what has meant the most to me—not the end product. The end product is the doo-doo of your experience. It’s the poop! No one’s ever going to have the experience you had doing it. I swear by this!

RVG: By this point, you’d lived a pretty full life. You’d had this super-hip New York life, and you’d been there and back with the drug thing. By the nineties, a lot of people were burned out and jaded. Have you ever thought about how you stayed engaged when other people were bitter?

DEB: Yes, I knew some of those people, and a couple of them committed suicide. I knew one guy who killed himself because he lost his portfolio. He had no record of anything he had ever done, so he killed himself. That’s how art can do you in. But also, I cannot overlook the long relationship with my husband of forty-two years, the genius mosaic artist Jolino Beserra. He has stood by my side since I came to the West Coast. He worked with me at the ad agency, then at the Advocate, and all through my freelancing as well.

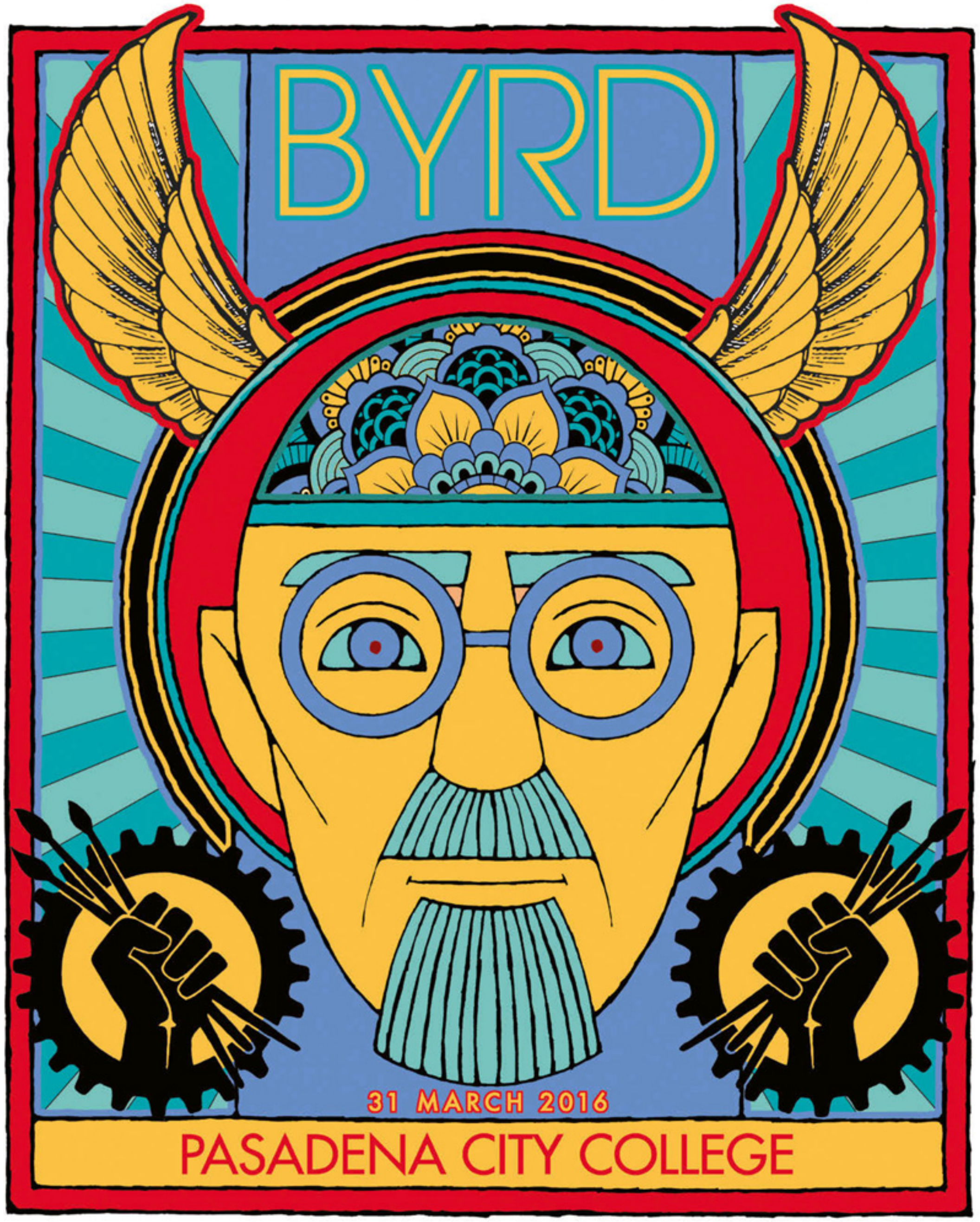
RVG: Do you see yourself as a survivor?

DEB: Oh god, yes. I was *not* gonna let my demons do me in. Though it’s something you really have to work at all the time.


AMERICAN CINEMATHEQUE
BYRD
THE AMERICAN CINEMATHEQUE AT PAN PACIFIC PARK
TEMPLE
·OF·
DREAMS
LOS ANGELES

This highly collected 1985 poster was made for American Cinematheque, a nonprofit arts organization in Los Angeles. The group was attempting to turn the landmark Pan-PacificAuditorium, which was abandoned, into a film and arts *center. Before they could achieve that goal, the theater burned to the ground in 1989. Byrd cocreated the poster with his partner Jolino Beserra*.

WRAPPING UP


BYRD
31 MARCH 2016
PASADENA CITY COLLEGE

Byrd made this illustration as part of a lecture on poster art he gave at Pasadena City College in 2016.

2023

Looking back at the career and life of David Edward Byrd is like riding a roller coaster. The highs of his art achievements contrast with the lows of a tumultuous life that is right out of a Hollywood biopic. Through everything, Byrd has remained a person who can reflect on his life with pride, appreciation, and humility. Ultimately, as many of his colleagues will attest, the greatness of his art is exceeded only by the caliber of his person.

Robert von Goeben: Wow, man, I think we're actually coming to the end of this book. Let me finish with this … you've had an incredible career spanning six decades. How do you feel that your style has stayed relevant? Is that something you ever think about?

David Edward Byrd: Not consciously like that. That I've been relevant for so many years.

RVG: Do you think of your work today in terms of current styles or relevancy to what's happening in the culture? Is that even on your mind anymore?

DEB: Well, I think I'm conscious of it. I really should expose myself more to it. But lot of my attraction to fine art kind of impeded my graphics. I feel like I come from the painting world, and it was hard for me to transition to the graphic world. It really was difficult, I was flying by the seat of my pants, that's for sure. I would say my biggest successes were *Follies*, the

Jimi Hendrix Filmore poster, and a few others. Those are my works that are, as people say, iconic images. That's why I was named in the Pratt 125th anniversary celebration recognizing iconic work by alumni and faculty. My Jimi Hendrix Fillmore poster was chosen to represent the 1960s. At the show, it was hanging underneath the Robert Mapplethorpe album cover for Patti Smith. Also, I was proud that it was named #8 on *Billboard*'s 25 Best Rock Posters of All Time. To be number eight is not bad.

RVG: If you were to look back, what one piece of artwork are you most proud of? What stands out to you personally?

DEB: You know, that's like asking, "Who's your favorite child?"

RVG: True. But deep down, everyone has their favorite child. [*laughs*]

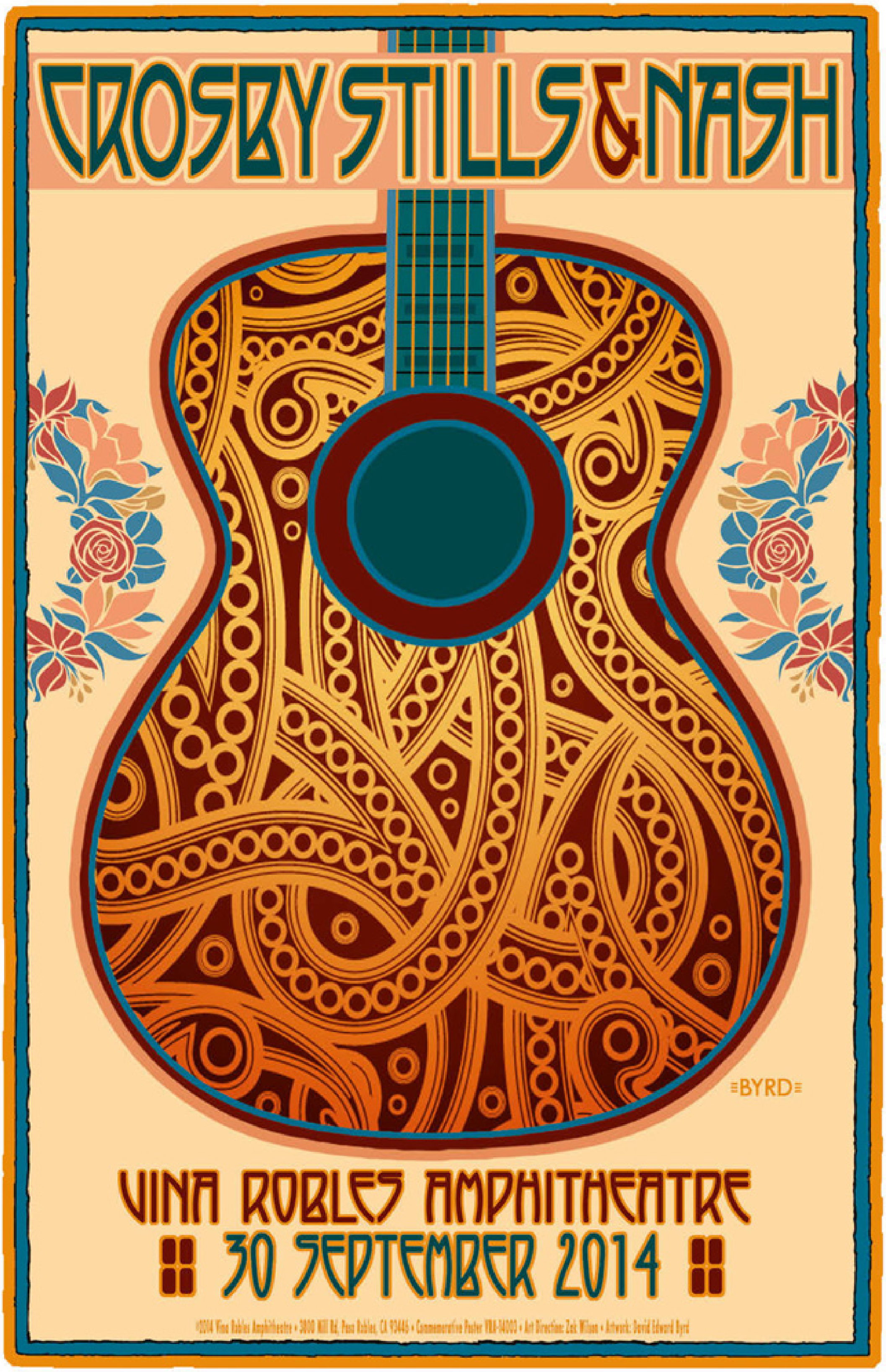
DEB: I would say my poster for the 1974 New York Art Deco Exposition at Radio City Music Hall. It is an object, like the objects in the show. That's what I like the most. People who collected and love this poster feel that way as well. And that was why I included the oversized seven-foot poster as part of my 2011 retrospective at the Brand Galleries.

RVG: Okay, I'll ask you a trite and cliché question.

DEB: Do I sleep in the nude?

RVG: Does the Santa's beard go inside or outside of the covers? [*laughs*] No, how do you want to be remembered?

DEB: Well, I want to be remembered for at least one poster. Whatever it is. And maybe more. Hopefully five. But I do feel like the curtain is closing; I'm aware of that. Goodnight, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are!



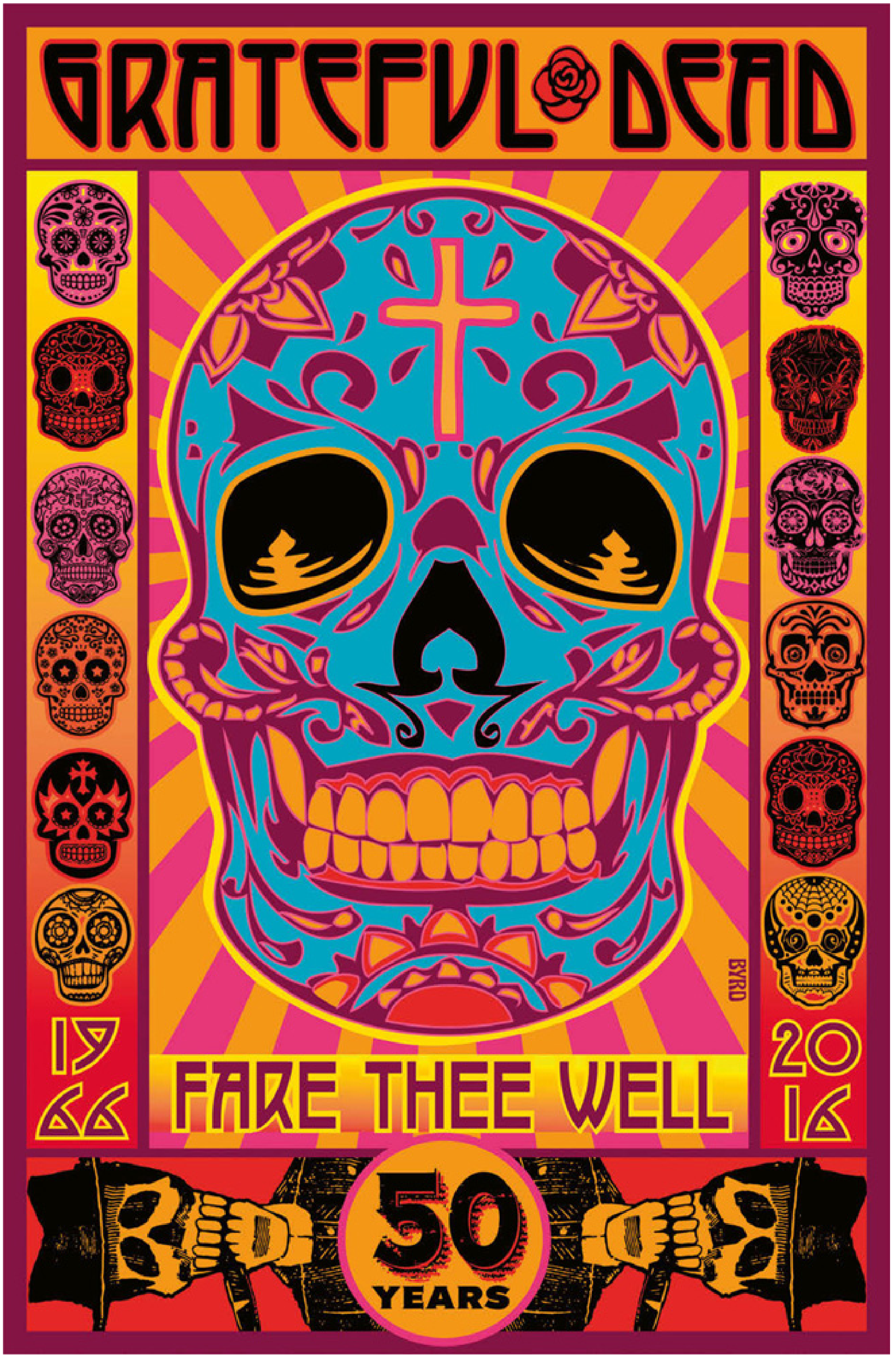
CROSBY STILLS & NASH

VINA ROBLES AMPHITHEATRE

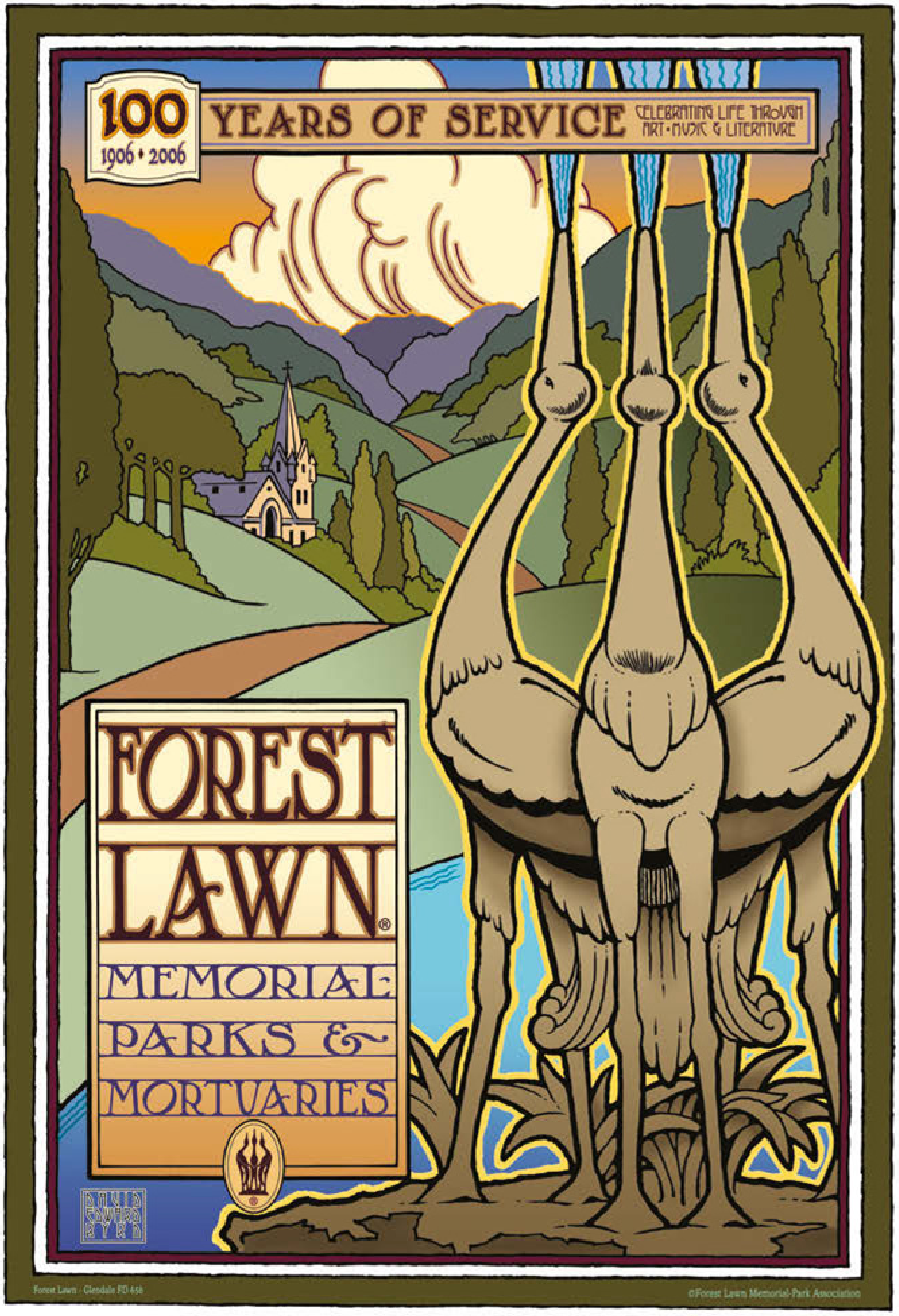
30 SEPTEMBER 2014

©2014 Vina Robles Amphitheatre • 3800 Mill Rd, Paso Robles, CA 93446 • Commemorative Poster VRA-14003 • Art Direction: Zak Wilson • Artwork: David Edward Byrd

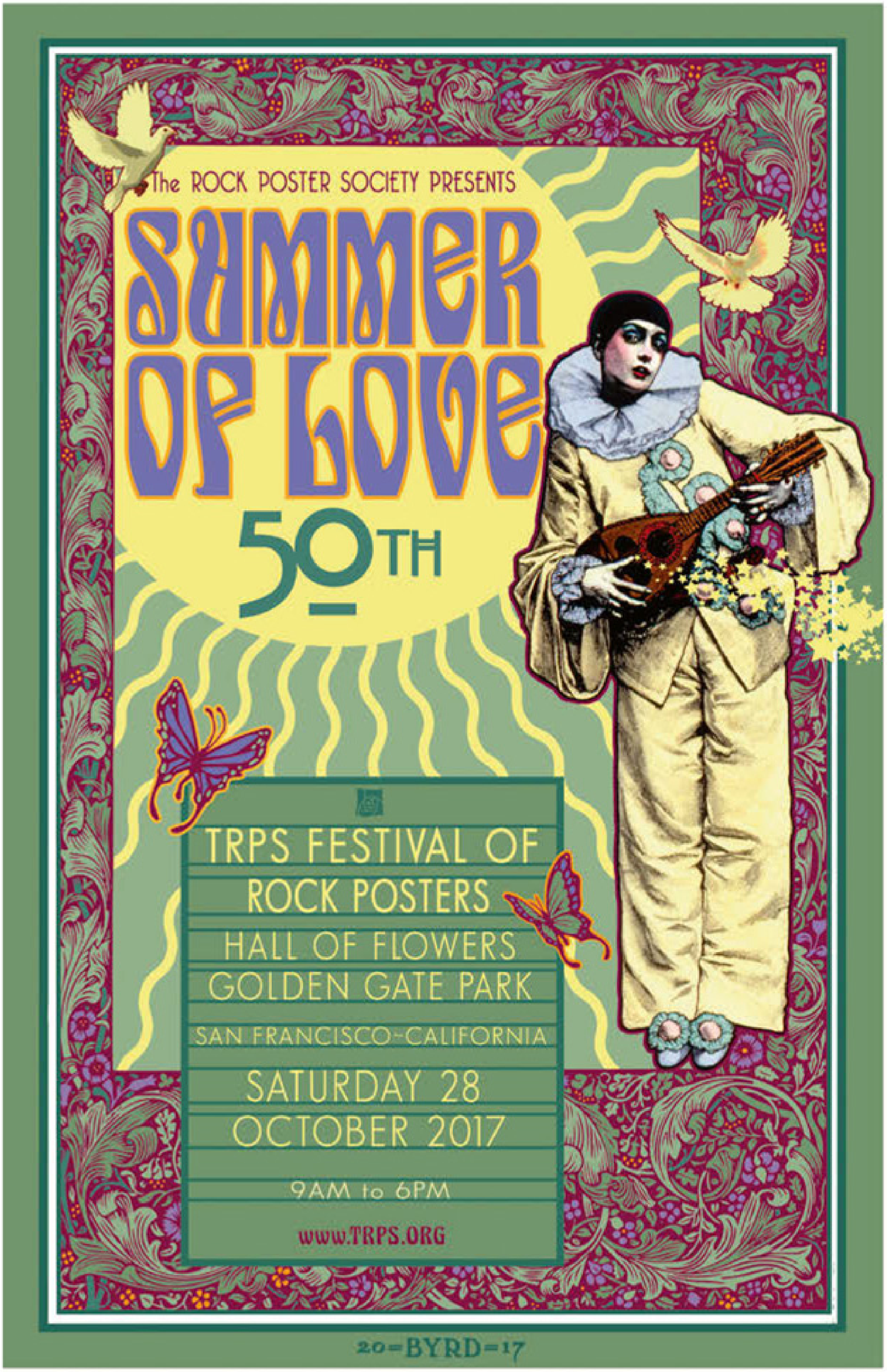
Byrd created this poster for a 2014 Crosby, Stills & Nash concert at the Vina Robles Amphitheatre in Paso Robles, California.


GRATEFUL DEAD
19
66
FARE THEE WELL
20
16
BYRD
50
YEARS

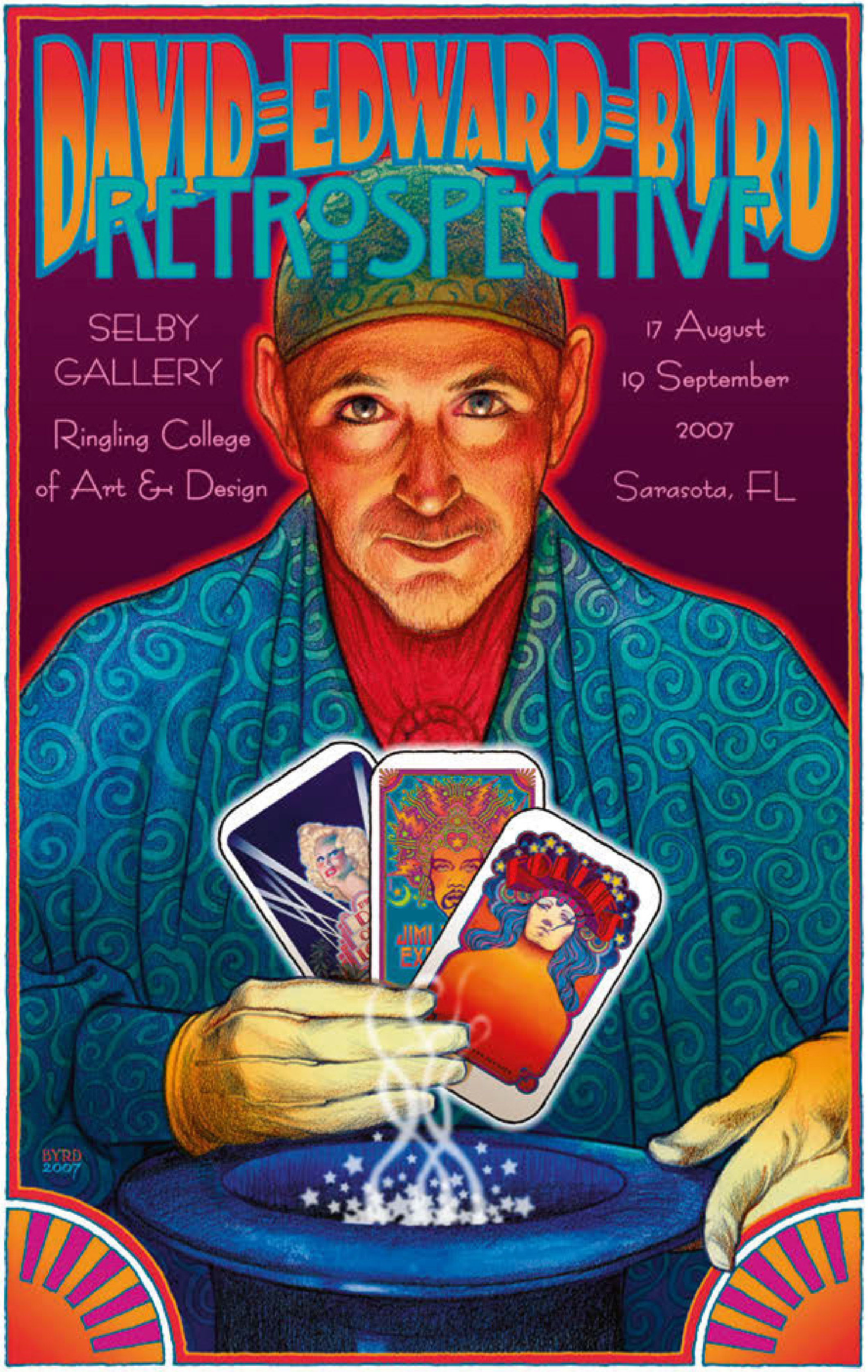
Byrd's 2016 poster celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Grateful Dead. He has felt an affinity for the band ever since he created his acclaimed 1973 Dead poster for concert promoter Bill Graham.


100
1906 • 2006
YEARS OF SERVICE
CELEBRATING LIFE THROUGH ART • MUSIC & LITERATURE
FOREST LAWN®
MEMORIAL PARKS & MORTUARIES
DAVID EDWARD BYRD
Forest Lawn · Glendale FD 656
©Forest Lawn Memorial-Park Association

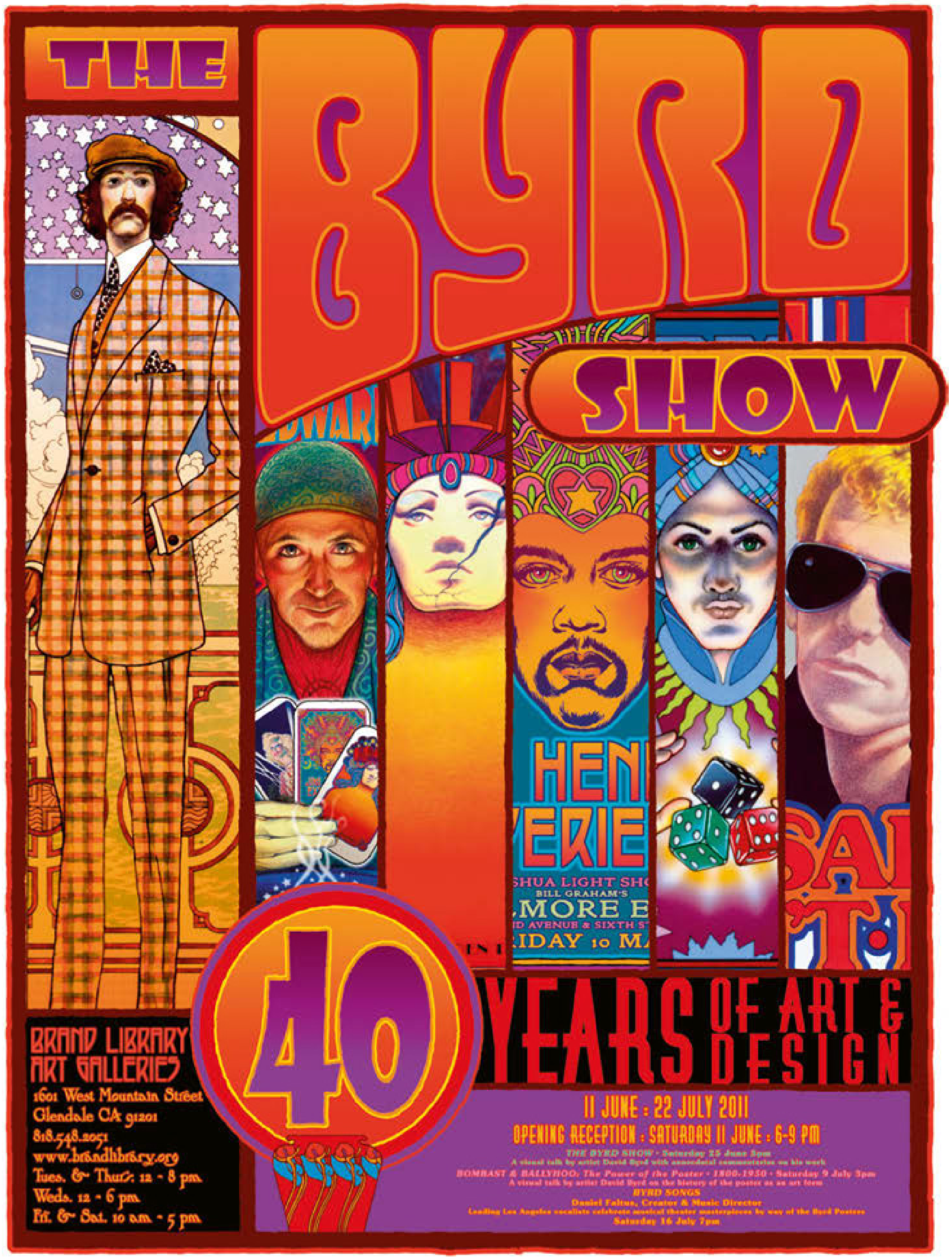
In 2006, Byrd was commissioned to create a poster celebrating the one-hundredth anniversary of the famous Forest Lawn Memorial-Parks & Mortuaries in Southern California.


The ROCK POSTER SOCIETY PRESENTS
SUMMER OF LOVE
50TH
TRPS FESTIVAL OF ROCK POSTERS
HALL OF FLOWERS
GOLDEN GATE PARK
SAN FRANCISCO-CALIFORNIA
SATURDAY 28
OCTOBER 2017
9AM to 6PM
www.TRPS.ORG
20=BYRD=17

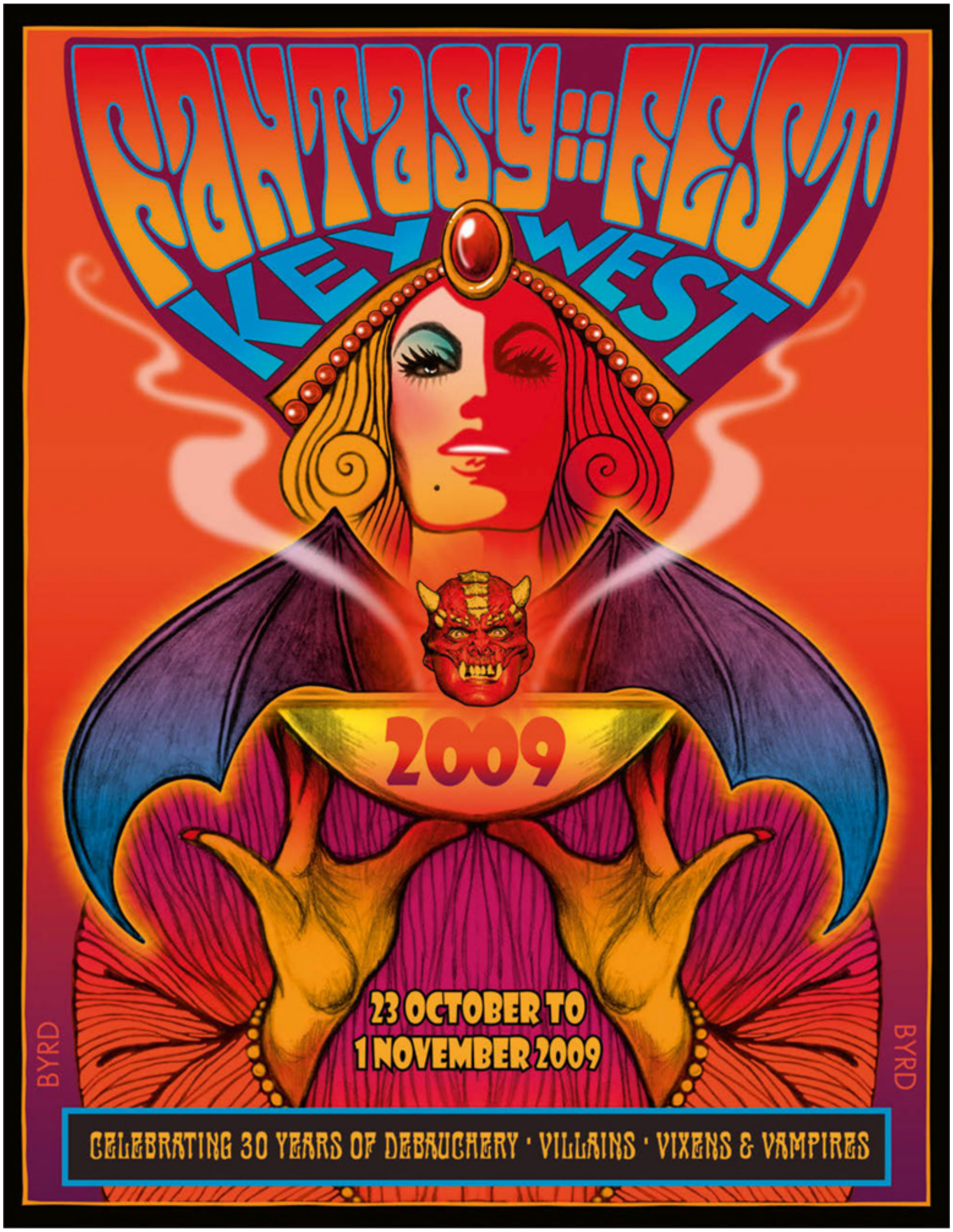
This 2017 Byrd poster for the Rock Poster Society's annual poster convention held in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco celebrates *the fiftieth anniversary of the Summer of Love*.


DAVID EDWARD BYRD
RETROSPECTIVE
SELBY
GALLERY
Ringling College
of Art & Design
17 August
19 September
2007
Sarasota, FL
JIMI
EX
BYRD
2007

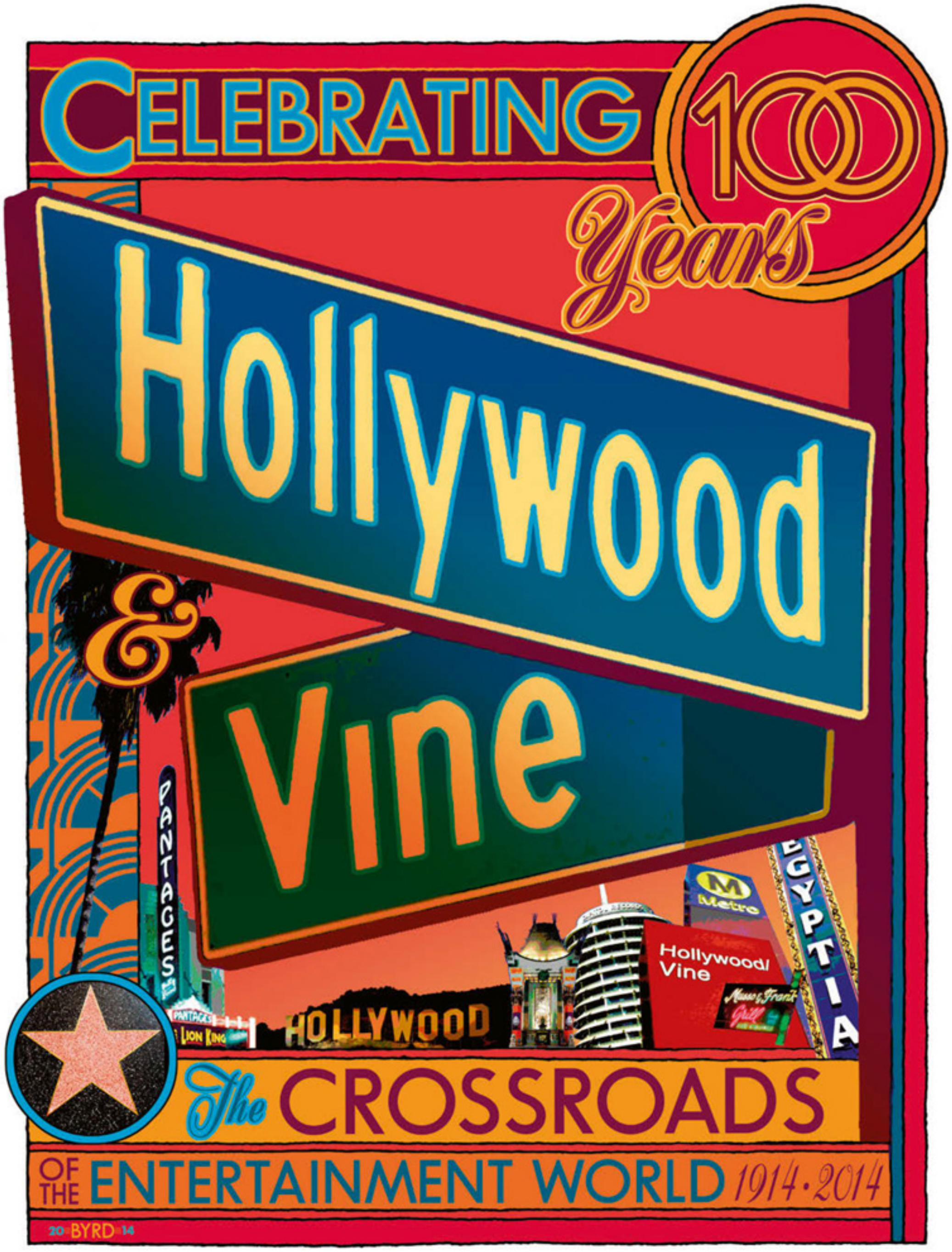
Byrd created this poster for a 2007 retrospective of his work at the Ringling College of Art & Design.


THE
BYRD
SHOW
40
YEARS OF ART & DESIGN
BRAND LIBRARY
ART GALLERIES
1601 West Mountain Street
Glendale CA 91201
818.548.2051
www.brandlibrary.org
Tues. & Thurs. 12 - 8 pm
Weds. 12 - 6 pm
Fri. & Sat. 10 am - 5 pm
11 JUNE : 22 JULY 2011
OPENING RECEPTION : SATURDAY 11 JUNE : 6-9 PM
THE BYRD SHOW · Saturday 25 June 3pm
A visual talk by artist David Byrd with anecdotal commentaries on his work
BOMBAST & BALLYHOO: The Power of the Poster · 1800-1950 · Saturday 9 July 3pm
A visual talk by artist David Byrd on the history of the poster as an art form
BYRD SONGS
Daniel Faltus, Creator & Music Director
Leading Los Angeles vocalists celebrate musical theater masterpieces by way of the Byrd Posters
Saturday 16 July 7pm

Brand Library & Art Center retrospective


FANTASY :: FEST
KEY WEST
2009
23 OCTOBER TO
1 NOVEMBER 2009
BYRD
BYRD
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF DEBAUCHERY · VILLAINS · VIXENS & VAMPIRES

Byrd submitted this poster for the 2009 Fantasy Fest street party held in Key West, Florida.


CELEBRATING
100
Years
Hollywood
&
Vine
PANTAGES
HOLLYWOOD
Metro
Hollywood/
Vine
Musso & Frank Grill
EGYPTIAN
The CROSSROADS
OF THE ENTERTAINMENT WORLD 1914·2014
20 BYRD 14

This 2014 Byrd poster celebrates the one-hundredth anniversary of the landmark intersection of Hollywood and Vine in Los Angeles.

AFTERWORD

by Jolino Beserra

WHEN DAVID ASKED ME TO WRITE AN AFTERWORD, I WAS REFLECTING ON THE FACT THAT I REALLY AM THE SECOND ACT OF DAVID'S LIFE AND CAREER, AS WE APPROACH FORTY-TWO YEARS TOGETHER.

We officially met in November of 1981. My mind flies back to the twenty-three-year-old student at the ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena who was first introduced to David Edward Byrd that summer. I needed to take two one-point classes in order to graduate. I chose Introduction to Electricity, where you basically needed to show up and know not to stick a fork in an electrical outlet to be able to pass. And then there was Introduction to the Poster, where I first saw David's work. *Follies*, Jimi Hendrix, and the reopening of Radio City Music Hall, in particular, blew me away.

David's exuberant color, design, and his unique drawing style grabbed me. It also made me emotionally aware of everything that I was running away from at the time. I was just coming to the realization that I was gay. This fear of exposure made me hold myself back and made me create safe, conservative, uninspired work. The excitement in David's poster art was what I cried out for but felt I could not express. I remember feeling depressed as I left the class, with graduation a few months away. Now I only have gratitude. Little did I know that I would meet David in time for our first Thanksgiving in 1981.

It was on one of my trips with college friends to Melrose Avenue that we discovered a small neighborhood gay bar that was themed somewhere between unicorns and leather. Melrose was still a mostly sleepy commercial street, except for a few design and clothing stores. I could not stop thinking about that gay bar. After a few weeks I decided to just walk into that gay bar. I did that and immediately ran out, terrified of what I was seeing and feeling. Later that fall on one of my speed walks around the bar, I saw David standing there. I actually sat down for the first time. He was so handsome that I didn't think that I could ever walk up to him—until he moved his arm, and I noticed that he had a tiny little hole in his beautiful knit sweater. It's weird how all of a sudden, I saw that hole as making him real and approachable. Now what!? I noticed that David smoked cigarettes, so when someone left a pack on a table, I picked it up, walked up to him, and asked him for a light.

I graduated from the ArtCenter that January. David had just finished his Van Halen tour artwork. He was working as an art director at a small ad agency in Hollywood. After three months we were living together. We drove in from our little house in the suburb of Tujunga with our first dog, Joshua. My new commitment to David included not hiding him in the tub if someone came over. So, out of the closet I came—out as a person in love with a wonderful artist who let me hide him in a tub in the first place and, of course, my soulmate.

I worked as David's assistant, mostly creating posters for theater. These master-class projects under David's direction were priceless. I developed and learned to embrace my own personal sense of color and design. In 1985 we became partners in business and life. Our Temple of Dreams poster is one of my favorite collaborations. I also knew by that point that I wasn't going to be the illustrator I thought I wanted to be.

David's love, humor, and devotion to living the life of artists together allowed me to explore different mediums. Along with being his assistant or just a fresh eye to look at his art, I painted toys for Mattel and did production art for film and television. My turning point was one summer volunteering at the Watts Towers and cementing broken pieces of tile. I found my voice as an artist, creating public and private pique-assiette mosaics.

I lucked into a rare version of David, who opened up a life of possibilities I couldn't have imagined. Whatever I achieve as an artist, it will always be second to my relationship with David. I wouldn't be the artist I am today without these first forty-two years together with my love, mentor, and best friend. The light from that first cigarette continues to burn.

Byrd and his partner of many decades, Jolino Beserra

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

David Edward Byrd: My beloved husband, helpmate, nurse, and confidant of forty-two years, JOLINO BESERRA, and our six canine street thugs that keep us real and somewhat grounded. • Beloved friends KIP COHEN and JOSHUA WHITE, who were there at the creation! Bless you and KISSES. • Dearest NINA NEVARD BERSON—there are too many words; I never expected we would be the last two standing; you were the much-needed female force in a group of smelly dudes, my dear; thank you and many HUGS! • FRAVER and TOM and ARTHUR: how could I be more blessed than to have had you three dudes as students that are now artist-legends in their own right. I am so thankful we have remained friends all these years. • JORDAN: this history very much includes HARRIET, who I wish were here for the Miami Beach throwback that it very much is. Where are you, Har? We gotta talk! • ADAM and DORIAN continue to share my love and devotion to the work of the late RICHARD AMSEL, a true savant and inspiring friend whose death still haunts my mind. • IAIN MORRIS + SUZI HUTSELL for the very lovely book design that attempted to foil them but they prevailed. KUDOS! • RYAN MAUCK gets three signed posters for his amazing left-brain prestidigitations! • Sweet kisses to all at CAMERON BOOKS for your extraordinary design engine that barrels forward with solutions where often there are not any—it's magic! • MARC MYERS, your intro is perfection: introducing not only me but the important art of the poster and its history! What an honor to have this encomium, thank you, Marc! • To my dear friend and coauthor ROBERT VON GOEBEN: You have taught me patience with the wisdom and compassion of a mentor. You have kept my silly theatrics to a minimum, as you helmed the whole project magnificently. For this, I thank you vociferously!

Robert von Goeben: Unraveling the unusual life of David Edward Byrd could only happen with the love and support of many wonderful people who helped in this cultural excavation, including: MARC MYERS is one of the most respected music writers active today, and we are very fortunate to have him write the foreword. *Anatomy of a Song*, his compilation series of *Wall Street Journal* columns capturing the stories behind popular songs, is required reading for any music fan. • FRANK "FRAVER" VERLIZZO and TOM NIKOSEY were both students of David Byrd at Pratt Institute and provided great insight into Byrd's life in the seventies. Verlizzo carried David's Broadway torch and has become one of the greatest theater artists ever. Nikosey has had a wildly successful career in entertainment and media, specializing in typography and iconography. • KIP COHEN and JOSHUA WHITE, both of whom worked with Bill Graham on the formation of the Fillmore East, provided invaluable perspectives on the era. Kip was the general manager of the Fillmore and Graham's right-hand man, and later took his talents to Los Angeles where he ran the famous Wiltern Theatre. Josh basically invented rock concert visuals with his acclaimed Joshua Light Show and is a legend in the industry. Without their introduction to Bill Graham in 1968, Byrd might still be back on the commune painting in a barn. • JORDAN BECK, the son of David's childhood friend and lifelong attorney Harriet Beck, was only a kid when Byrd arrived in LA. But if you look closely at the Van Halen artwork in this book, you might find his nascent contributions. Now all grown up, Jordan is a successful Hollywood writer and producer. • DORIAN HANNAWAY gave great insight into David's New York life in the '70s. Her TV interview of Byrd and Richard Amsel for *Emerald City* is one of the few videos of these artists together that is known to exist. Dorian went on to have a successful career in late-night television with CBS and was the coauthor with Debbie Reynolds of her memoir *Unsinkable*.• NINA BERSON helped us understand David's years at Carnegie Tech and after. Together with Byrd and Peter Nevard (David's college roommate and her first husband), she started the infamous Fantasy Unlimited artists' collective in 1967, which brought the new hippie aesthetic to companies such as Clairol, Yardley, and Bill Blass. She's since gone on to become a successful art curator and professor. • ROGER PUCKETT was immensely important in getting Byrd's talents recognized. Among other things, he is the man responsible for getting David's *Follies* design in front of the producer. • ARTHUR K. MILLER, who was David's student at the School of Visual Arts and later his assistant, gave us a rare insider's view of Byrd's career. His fine art, including his extraordinary baseball portraits, are exhibited and collected internationally. • KENN LUBIN also provided great insight into David's career during the seventies. He's gone on to a successful career in Broadway creative development. • ADAM McDANIEL is an artist and filmmaker who helped us through his knowledge of Richard Amsel (the renowned artist and Byrd's best friend), whom McDaniel has studied for many years. • ROSA PHOENIX has been with this project from the beginning, and without her transcription work turning babbling interviews into intelligible dialogue, this book would have never happened. • RYAN MAUCK was our indispensable legal partner in this project. His hard work and generous spirit helped drive this book to completion. • CAMERON BOOKS: Chris Gruener, Iain Morris, Pippa White, Jan Hughes, Suzi Hutsell, and Krista Keplinger were in our corner from the beginning and are terrific people to work with. • While no longer with us, BILL GRAHAM is immensely important to his story. The entire music industry owes him a debt of gratitude! Also, we sadly missed interviewing STEPHEN SONDHEIM and NOEL MONK by mere months, but they loom large over this book. • KATHRYN SIEGLER is my wife of many decades and the "Wisconsin cutie" from the introduction. A renowned fine artist, her support and love pushed this project to completion! • Extra special thanks to Carolyn Backer, Deke Donelian, Brandon Jay, Alex Livadas, Paul Leatherman, KC Mancebo, Larry McCallister, Miranda Moore, Keith Pray, Lindsay Nevard, Neil Zlozower, Jack Rennert, and Terry Shargel. • This book would never happen without the Deep Cuts Trivia knuckleheads: Scott Hamilton, Pat Piasecki, Craig Forde, Jim Trembly, Tim Conklin, Shahram Baradaran, and, of course, my main man, DJ Mackmatic Mack McConnell. • I am honored and privileged that my dear friend DAVID EDWARD BYRD allowed me to come along for the ride. Many times during this project, he graciously acknowledged my hard work, to which I felt compelled to reply, "I got the easy part … you had to create the art and live the life!" • FINALLY, to anyone we might have been left out, you have both our apologies and our eternal gratitude!

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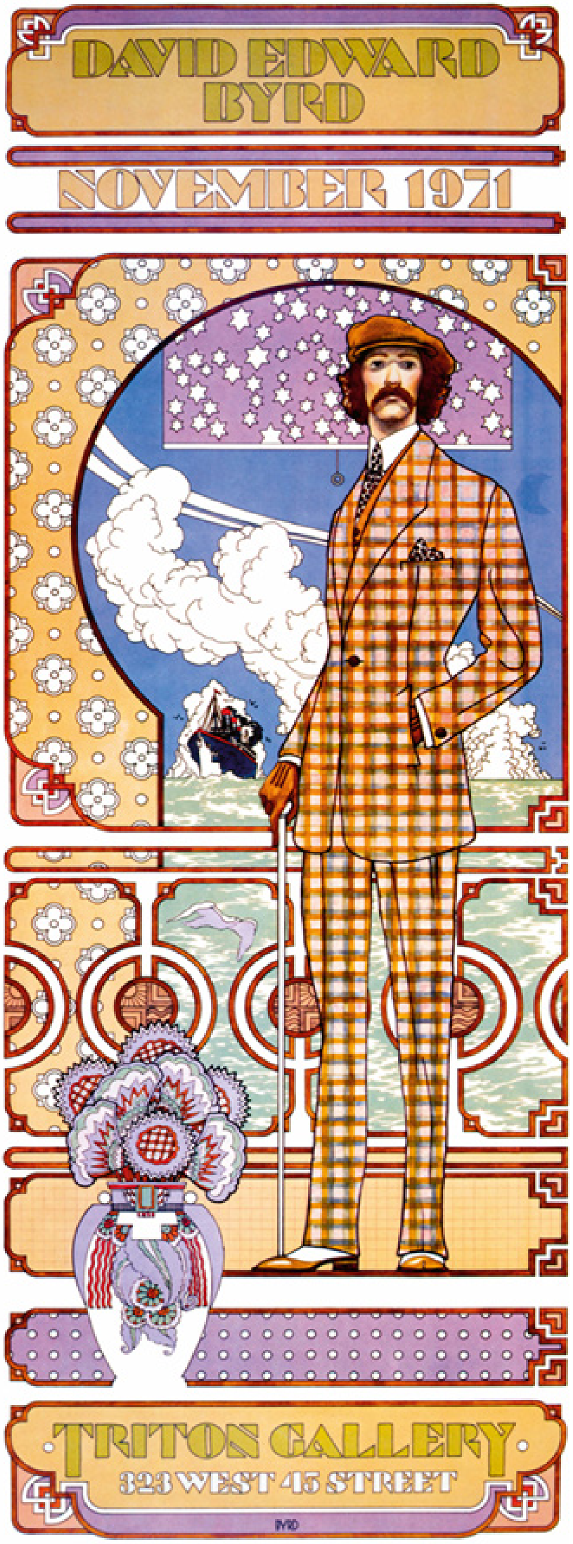
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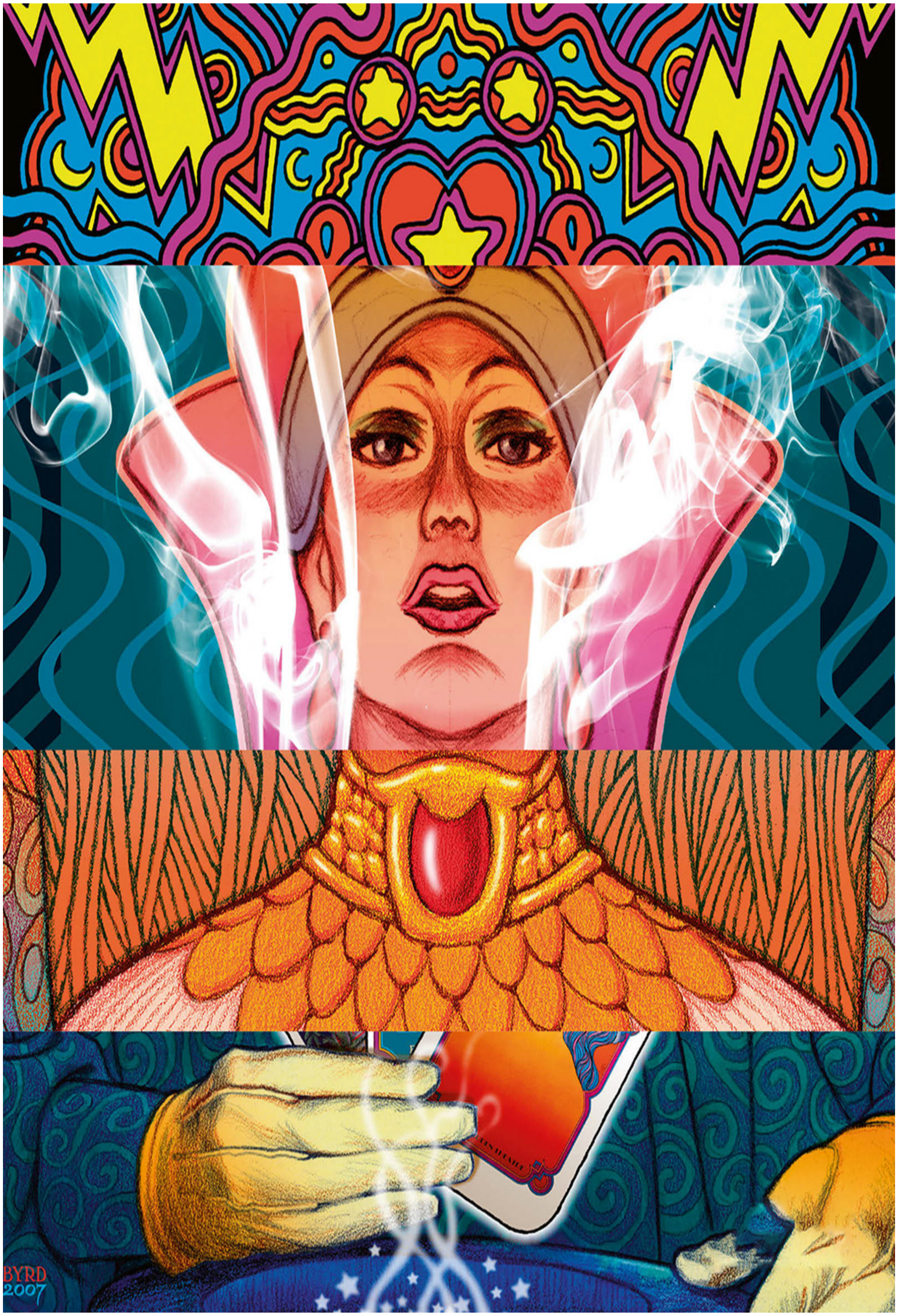
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